

ZURAB PAPASKIRI



**ON THE NATIONAL, POLITICAL, ETHNICAL
AND CULTURAL IDENTITY
OF CONTEMPORARY ABKHAZIA**
From Ancient Times till the Present Day

**SOKHUMI STATE UNIVERSITY
ABKHAZIAN ORGANIZATION OF THE ALL-GEORGIAN
EKVTIME TAKAISHVILI HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

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Tbilisi – 2020

UDC (უკუ) 94(479.224)+39 (479.224)+32(479.224)
3-182

The book combines several essays that the author published in English-language journals and scholarly collections. Besides, the book encloses one French and one German publication. The presented materials review urgent problems of the history of contemporary Abkhazia. These issues make it clear that historically Abkhazia has always been an organic part of united Georgian ethnocultural, political, and state universe.

Editor: **Teimuraz Papaskiri**,
Professor Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University

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ISBN 978-9941-25-806-0

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Editor's Note

The book combines several essays that were published by the author in English-language journals and scholarly collections. The presented articles were originally written either in Georgian or in Russian and then they were translated by the editorial staff of the respective editions. The translations usually were quite skillful, and the English text is following the Georgian or Russian originals, although there are sometimes certain terminological errors. On some very limited occasions, there were also lapses that are more significant to the matter of the subject. Because of this, it was decided to revise the articles and edit them.

The main reason for such interference is the meaning of terms “Abkhazia,” “Abkhaz,” “the Abkhazs,” and “Abkhazian.” As a rule, in English, the Georgian words „აფხაზი“ (“afkhazi” – Abkhaz), „აფხაზეთის“ (“afxazet’is” – Abkhazian in the geographical meaning of the word) and „აფხაზური“ (“afkhazuri” – Abkhazian in ethnical, not in the geographical meaning of the word) are usually translated as “Abkhazian” (in geographical meaning). For example, the phrases like “Abkhazian intelligentsia” („აფხაზური ინტელიგენცია“ – “afxazuri inteligentsia”) and “Abkhazian Bolsheviks” („აფხაზი ბოლშევიკები“ – “afxazi bolshevikები”) are usually understood by the English-speaking readers as “intelligentsia of Abkhazia” and “Bolsheviks of Abkhazia.” Meanwhile, in original, their meaning is “the Abkhaz intelligentsia” and “the Abkhaz Bolsheviks.” Therefore, it was decided to use the word “Abkhaz” instead of “Abkhazian” when the meaning is clearly ethnical and not geographical. Furthermore, there was introduced the term “Abkhazs” which is used to translate the Georgian idioms „მეფე აფხაზთა“ (“mefe afkhazt’a” – “king of the ‘Abkhazs’”) and „აფხაზთა სამეფო“ (“afkhazt’a samefo” – “kingdom of the ‘Abkhazs’”) correctly.

Besides the revisions mentioned above, corrections were made to some geographical or family names in the articles translated from Russian, when the translators automatically used the Russian forms of those names in genitive and dative cases. And finally, there were made some stylistic changes or revisions.

ABKHAZIA AND THE ABKHAZS IN THE COMMON GEORGIAN ETHNOCULTURAL, POLITICAL, AND STATE UNIVERSE*

Introduction

Exactly a quarter of a century ago the tragic fratricidal war in Abkhazia temporarily deprived Georgia of one of the republic's most picturesque sites. Much has been written about the Abkhazian tragedy since. However, an all-round and exhaustive analysis of the 1992-1993 events is still to come.

The prerequisites of the confrontation between the Georgians and the Abkhazs go back at least one hundred years. In the 1860s, the Russian Empire drew up a so-called "state program" aimed at breaking up the centuries-old historical and cultural unity of Georgians and the Abkhazs. In 1907, a book came out (traditionally ascribed to N. Voronov) under the provocative title of *"Abkhazia is not Georgia"* (*"Abkhazia – ne Gruzia"*).

In the 1920s, the separatist-minded groups of the so-called Abkhaz "people's" intelligentsia took up the formula to develop it into what was described as the program works by S. Basaria¹ and

* First published as: **Zurab Papaskiri**. Abkhazia and the Abkhazs in the Common Georgian Ethno-Cultural, Political, and State Expanse. In: *The Caucasus & Globalization*. Journal of Social, Political and Economic Studies. Institute of studies of the Caucasus. Part I. Vol. 2. Issue 2, 2008, CA&CC Press®. Sweden, pp. 105-121 [<https://cyberleninka.ru/article/v/abkhazia-and-the-abkhazians-in-the-common-georgian-ethno-cultural-political-and-state-expanse>]; Part II. Vol. 2. Issue 4, 2008, CA&CC Press®. Sveden, pp. 95-107 [<https://cyberleninka.ru/article/v/abkhazia-and-the-abkhazians-in-the-common-georgian-ethno-cultural-political-and-state-expanse-1>]. The text is printed with the clarifications, mentioned in the editor's foreword.

¹ **S. Basaria**. Abkhazia in Geographical, Ethnographic and Economic terms. Sukhum-Kale, 1923 /in Russian/.

S. Ashkhatsava.¹ Their deliberations about Abkhazia's past served as a historiographic justification of the "state independence" of the Abkhazian SSR set up by the local Bolsheviks in March 1921. The domestic political climate of the 1950s in the USSR revived the separatist ideology in Abkhazia: the "national" history of the Abkhazs, separate from the history of Georgia, reappeared on the agenda. Still, the two volumes of *Essays on the History of the Abkhazian ASSR (Ocherki istorii Abkhazskoy ASSR)*² written by a group of Georgian and Abkhaz historians headed by outstanding Abkhaz scholar, corresponding member of the Georgian Academy of Sciences Prof. G. Dzidzaria, firmly put the Abkhaz past into a common Georgian context.

The separatist sentiments persisted and even accelerated in the latter half of the 1960s, when some Abkhaz and Russian historians, archaeologists, and writers distorted the common past of the Georgians and Abkhazs and dwelt on mostly fictitious facts of Georgian pressure on the Abkhazs. **They spoke of twelve or even twenty-five centuries of Abkhaz statehood and described the region as the homeland of only the Apsua-Abkhaz people invested with the exclusive right to look after the present and future of their native land.**

The Georgians were dismissed as newcomers. Any attempt to describe them (along with the Abkhazs) as an autochthonous group, was rejected as unscientific and pernicious. It had nothing in common with genuine scholarship. For this reason, certain zealous historians and writers have failed to upturn the plain facts of history and bury the very memory of the centuries-long historical, cultural, and political unity between the Georgians and Abkhazs.

¹ **S. Ashkhatsava.** The Ways of Development of Abkhaz History. The publication of the Commissariat of Education of Abkhazia, 1925 /in Russian/.

² *Essays on the History Abkhazian ASSR.* Vol. I. Sukhumi, 1960; Vol. II. Tbilisi, 1964 /in Russian/.

The science of history has never been and will never be free from disagreements over certain issues. The history of Abkhazia is no exception, but on the whole, it has been studied in great detail (thanks to the efforts, in particular, of prominent Abkhaz historians Z. Anchabadze and G. Dzidzaria). It means that a radical revision of Abkhazia's past is hardly possible, even though historians can and should probe deeper into the individual aspects of the history of Abkhazia. Such efforts are especially needed today: in the past, totalitarian ideological pressure made objective discussions of the history of Abkhazia (especially in the 19th and 20th centuries) next to impossible. Recently, Georgian historiography has been demonstrating an ever-growing interest in the history of Abkhazia discussed in the notable works by T. Gamkrelidze, M. Lordkipanidze, D. Muskhelishvili, E. Khoshtaria-Brosse, N. Lomouri, G. Tsulaia, G. Gasviani, T. Mubchuani, L. Toidze, A. Menteshashvili, G. Lezhava, G. Zhorzholiani, J. Gamakharia, B. Gogia, Z. Papaskiri, B. Khorava, L. Akhaladze, D. Chitaia, and others. Among them, the *Investigations in the History of Abkhazia/Georgia*¹ stands apart. It brought together the best generalizing works by prominent Georgian historians² dealing with the major aspects of the

¹ *Investigations in the History of Abkhazia/Georgia*. Tbilisi, 1999 /in Russian/.

² The *Essays on the History Abkhazian ASSR* mentioned above can be described as the first generalizing work on the history of Abkhazia from ancient times to the mid-20th century. **Z. Anchabadze's** *Essay on the ethnic history of the Abkhaz people*, which appeared in 1976 (in Russian), and the textbook *History of Abkhazia* (Sukhumi, 1986 /in Russian/) by **Z. Anchabadze, G. Dzidzaria** and **A. Kuprava** provided a general picture of the past of the Abkhazians even though the political and ideological context in which they appeared grossly distorted an objective exposition of the past (the history of the 19th and 20th centuries especially). The so-called textbooks on the history of Abkhazia published under the separatist regime cannot be described as objective either (*History of Abkhazia*. Textbook. Ed. by **S. Lakoba**. Sukhumi, 1991; **O. Bgazhba, S. Lakoba**. *History of Abkhazia*. From Ancient

history, archaeology, and ethnography of contemporary Abkhazia.

This article uses the accumulated historiographic material to provide a general overview of Abkhazia's past and demonstrate the true political, state, and ethnocultural makeup of the territory now called Abkhazia from ancient times to 1993.

Ethnic Identity of the Earliest Population of Northwestern Colchis

The ethnic and tribal identity of the autochthonous population of what is now Abkhazia is one of the most complicated historiographic problems. Like all other Georgian regions, Abkhazia was populated during the Lower Paleolithic, that is, about half a million years ago. An analysis of the artefacts from the Early Paleolithic monuments of Abkhazia reveals their similarity to the contemporary collections from Central Colchis and the Rioni-Kvirila basin in particular. At the same time, *“there is a certain similarity ... to the monuments of the Northwestern Caucasus and the Kuban area”*.¹

In the Late Paleolithic (about 35,000 years ago), a common Late Paleolithic culture took shape in Western Georgia, evidence of a certain ethnocultural and linguistic communality.² During the Mesolithic Age, Western Georgia (its northwestern part where Abkhazia is now situated) underwent further development. By that time, the Caucasus had been divided into three territorial groups of monuments (Transcaucasian, Gubskaia, and Chokhskaia). The local features that had taken shape by that time at all the monuments of

Times to the Present Day. Textbook. 10-11th grades. Sukhumi, 2006 /in Russian/).

¹ **O. Japadidze.** The Ethnocultural Situation in the Northwestern Transcaucasus in the Stone and Early Metal Epoch. – *Investigations in the History of Abkhazia/Georgia*. Tbilisi, 1999, p. 7 /in Russian/.

² **O. Japadidze.** The Ethnocultural Situation, p. 8.

material culture are ascribed to the budding changes in the surmised Caucasian ethnocultural unity.¹

In the Neolithic Age, the material culture on the territory of contemporary Abkhazia revealed numerous common features with the Neolithic culture of Central and Southwestern Colchis.² The distinctive features identified by archaeologists are ascribed to the continued process of ethnic delimitation of the Caucasian population.³ It is thought that “the local specifics observed in the Late Neolithic culture probably indicate that the process of ethnic and linguistic delimitation was underway” and that “the main kindred groups of the Caucasian languages were being formed”: East Caucasian (or Proto-Nakho-Daghestani), West-Caucasian (or Proto-Adighe-Abkhaz), and South Caucasian (or Proto-Kartvelian).⁴

During the Early Bronze Age (approximately starting with the mid-third millennium B.C.), the so-called Dolmen Culture appeared and spread across what is now Abkhazia; it was limited to the northwestern part of Colchis and was never discovered to the south of the Azanta, near Sukhumi. It is believed that this was caused by ethnic shifts; according to some experts, the Kaska tribes from the northeastern sector of Asia Minor who spoke the Proto-Hattic language moved to the territory of contemporary Abkhazia at the turn of the second millennium B.C.⁵ This led historians to surmise that the Kaska of Asia Minor, as well as the Abeshla

¹ **O. Japadidze.** The Ethnocultural Situation, p. 9.

² **K. Kalandadze.** The Neolithic Culture of Western Georgia in the Light of Recent Archaeological Discoveries. Tbilisi, 1986, pp. 15-49 /in Georgian/; **O. Japadidze.** The Ethnocultural Situation, p. 10.

³ **G. Pkhakadze.** Eneolithic Remains of the Okum Cave. – In: *Materials for the Archeology of Georgia and the Caucasus*, VII. Tbilisi, 1979, pp. 68-76 /in Georgian/; **O. Japadidze.** The Ethnocultural Situation, p. 11.

⁴ **O. Japadidze.** The Ethnocultural Situation, p. 13.

⁵ **L. Soloviev.** A New Monument of Cultural Ties of the Caucasian Black Sea Coast in the Neolithic and Bronze Age – the Settlements of the

tribes, mixed with the local kindred population to form the Abkhaz ethnos.¹ At the same time, there is the opinion that the entire territory of historical Colchis (stretching from the western part of the Northern Caucasus to the northeastern regions of Asia Minor) was the homeland of the Abkhaz-Adighe-Hattian tribes.²

Georgian historians (O. Japaridze and others) have never denied that there was an inflow from the south, although they never accepted this as a decisive factor; by the same token they rule out significant ethnic shifts in northwestern Colchis.³ Indeed, the material culture of the dolmens was obviously local – a direct indication that no serious ethnic changes took place in what is now Abkhazia.⁴ Georgian archaeologists, however, do not exclude certain local specifics to the north of the Gumista River and explain them by the arrival of the first wave of Abkhaz-Adighe tribes. The main population was of Kartvelian origin (the Megrelo-Chans, Svans, and others). Academician S. Janashia, whose scholarly authority was never questioned among the Abkhazs, wrote at one

Vorontsov Caves. – *Proceedings of the Abkhazian Scientific-Research Institute of Language, Literature and History of the Academy of Sciences of the Georgian SSR*. Sukhumi, 1958, pp. 135-164 /in Russian/; **Z. Anchabadze**. *The History and Culture of Ancient Abkhazia*. Moscow, 1964, pp. 124-125 /in Russian/.

¹ **Z. Anchabadze**. *The History and Culture of Ancient Abkhazia*, pp. 120-126; **Sh. Inal-ipa**. *Aspects of the Ethnocultural History of the Abkhazians*. Sukhumi, 1976, p. 120 /in Russian/.

² **Sh. Inal-ipa**. *Aspects of the Ethnocultural History of the Abkhazians*, p. 145; **V. Ardzinba, V. Chirikba**. *The origin of the Abkhazian people*. – In: *History of Abkhazia*. Tutorial. Ed. by **S. Lakoba**. Sukhumi, 1991, p. 11 /in Russian/.

³ **O. Japaridze**. *On Ethnic History of the Kartvelian Tribes*. Tbilisi, 1976, pp. 299-301; **G. Melikishvili**. *On the Ancient Population of Georgia, the Caucasus and the Middle East*. Tbilisi, 1965, p. 42 (both in Georgian).

⁴ **O. Japadidze**. *The Ethnocultural Situation*, p. 14.

time that the Kartvelian (Megrelo-Chan) population predated the Abkhaz-Adighes on the territory of contemporary Abkhazia.¹

Archaeological finds to the north of the Gumista dated to the so-called Colchian Culture (about the 14th-7th centuries B.C.) reveal certain specific features which identified that area as a local region of the common Colchian Culture of the Late Bronze and Early Iron Ages.² At the same time, the area to the north of the Gumista largely remained part of the common West Georgian culture.³ It means that at the turn of the first millennium B.C. no serious ethnic shifts could occur in what is now Abkhazia (to say nothing of historical Colchis as a whole, something that Yuri Voronov suggested in his book).⁴ It is confirmed by anthropological data.⁵

It is much harder to decide which language the population of Abkhazia used in the Bronze Age. For a long time, the academic community (P. Uslar, I. Javakhishvili, S. Janashia, A. Chikobava, K.

¹ **S. Janashia.** Tabal-tubal, Tibareni, Iberi. – In: **S. Janashia.** Works. Vol. III. Tbilisi, 1959, p. 15 /in Georgian/.

² A specific burial rite in urns (clay vessels), so-called secondary burial, in particular (see: **B. Kuftin.** Materials for the Archaeology of Colchis. *Three stages in the history of the Cultural and Ethnic Formation of Feudal Abkhazia.* Vol. I, Tbilisi, 1949, pp. 178-192; **M. Baramidze.** Some Problems of Archaeology of the Western Transcaucasus in the 3rd – 1st Millennia B.C. – *Investigations in the History of Abkhazia/Georgia.* Tbilisi, 1999, p. 31 /in Russian/.

³ **M. Baramidze.** Some Problems of Archaeology of the Western, p. 32.

⁴ **Yu. Voronov.** Abkhazians – Who Are They? Gagra, 1993, p. 8 /in Russian/.

⁵ **M. Abdushelishvili.** Anthropology of the ancient and modern population of Georgia. Tbilisi, 1964, p. 90, in Russian. For more detail, see: **M. Abdushelishvili.** Anthropological analysis of the aboriginal population of the Caucasus. – *Proceedings of the Moscow Society of Naturalists*, Vol. XLIII, Moscow, 1972, p. 231 **Yu. Voronov.** Abkhazians – who are they? Gagra, 1993, p. 8 /in Russian/; **O. Japaridze.** On Ethnic History of the Kartvelian Tribes, p. 305.

Lomtadze, E. Bokarev, and others) remained convinced that the Caucasian languages were “genetically” related. Recently, however, this conviction was shattered: academics, some of them highly respected (G. Machavariani, T. Gamkrelidze, S. Nikolaev and S. Starostin, H. Fenrich, and others), reject the “genetic” kinship of the Kartvelian tongues with the North Caucasian languages. The idea of the kinship of the North Caucasian languages with the ancient tongues of Asia Minor is gaining recognition among academics. Until quite recently, it was generally accepted that the Abkhaz-Adighe and Hattic tongues were close relatives (A. Militarev, S. Starostin, and Viach. Vs. Ivanov).

Purely linguistic data were studied, as well as the obvious similarity of the ethnonym “Kashki” with the medieval names of the Adighe-Circassians: Kasakhia-Kasakhi of Byzantine authors; Kashak-Kashakia of Arabian sources; Kosogi of the Old Russian chronicles; Kashagni of the Georgian chronicles, etc.¹ On the strength of this, it was usually surmised that the Kashkis of the Hittite cuneiform texts were related to the Abkhaz-Adighe tribes. It was seemingly in line with the fact that Assyrian cuneiform inscriptions of the 12th-11th centuries B.C. mention the Abeshla tribe, which, on the one hand, was interpreted as a variant (synonym) of Kashki and, on the other, was identified with the Apsil ethnonym (Apshil-Apsua).²

Recently, however, the idea about the kinship between the Kashki and Abeshla tribes and the Proto-Hittite (Hattic) population

¹ **G. Giorgadze.** Non-Indo-European Ethnic Groups (the Hattians and the Kaska) in Ancient Anatolia According to Hittite Cuneiform Texts. – *Investigations in the History of Abkhazia/Georgia*. Tbilisi, 1999, p. 52 **Yu. Voronov.** Abkhazians – who are they? Gagra, 1993, p. 8 /in Russian/. See also: **N. Volkova.** Ethnonyms and Tribal Names of the North Caucasus. Moscow, 1973, p. 19 /in Russian/.

² **G. Giorgadze.** Non-Indo-European Ethnic Groups, pp. 52-53.

of Asia Minor was radically revised. According to one of the best experts in the Hattic-Anatolian world, academician G. Giorgadze, the Kashkis and Abeshla were not necessarily related to the Hattians. More likely than not, they belonged to the Colchian (Kartvelian) ethnic world.¹ He rejected a possible kinship between the Kashkis and Abeshla and the ancestors of the Adighe-Abkhazs² on the strength that the “original place of the Hattians should not be sought in Asia Minor” but in the Northwestern Caucasus, from which “they probably moved to the northern part of Central Anatolia.”³

The above suggests that in the primitive age, starting with the Upper Paleolithic, the territory of contemporary Abkhazia was part of the area of a uniform material culture created, in all probability, by ethnically kindred tribes with common Caucasian roots. In the Bronze Age (or even earlier), a certain paleo-Caucasian ethnic communality was differentiated, which gave rise to local specifics inside the uniform material culture. This makes it possible to identify a local region on the territory of contemporary Abkhazia to the north of the Gumista created by the ethnically specific population of the region that differed from the rest of the regions of historical Colchis. The ancestors of the contemporary Abkhazs probably formed part of its ancient population. There are no doubts about the rest of Colchis, including part of Abkhazia to the south of the Gumista: these parts were populated by those who created the Colchian Culture (Megrelo-Chans, Svans, and other Kartvelian tribes). At the same time, Kartvelian tribes probably settled in the northern part of contemporary Abkhazia.

¹ **G. Giorgadze.** Non-Indo-European Ethnic Groups, pp. 45-55.

² **G. Giorgadze.** Non-Indo-European Ethnic Groups, p. 55.

³ **G. Giorgadze.** Non-Indo-European Ethnic Groups, p. 48-49.

***Ethnic Map and State-Political Makeup of Northwestern
Colchis between the First Millennium B.C.
and the 8th Century A.D.***

The earliest written information about the tribes of the Northwestern Caucasus was supplied by Hecataeus of Miletus (in the 6th century B.C.) in his *Periegesis* (Tour Around the World), where he mentioned the “Kolas living on the lower slopes of the Caucasian Range and the Korakses living to the west of them.” In his *Ethnica dictionary, Stephanus of Byzantium (the 6th century A.D.)*, who preserved bits and pieces of Hecataeus’ work, called them the Colchian tribes.¹ *Periplus* of Pseudo-Scylax of Carianda (4th century B.C.) directly indicated that the territory “to the south of the Korakses and Kols between Dioscuria (now Sukhumi) and the Ap-saros River (the Chorokhi River) was populated by ... the Colchis in early antiquity”.²

It has been long established that the Colchis were a West Georgian (Megrelo-Chan) tribe even though some academics still insist that the Colchis were the Abkhazs.³ It should be said that the term could be described as a blanket one for several (including some of the non-Kartvelian) tribes, yet the original ethnic content of the ethnonym “Colchis” presupposed the West Georgian Megrelo-Chan population and other Kartvelian tribes living within historical Colchis.

The above leaves no doubts about the fact that in the first millennium B.C. the territory of contemporary Abkhazia – its

¹ **M. Inadze.** Problems of the Ethnopolitical History of Ancient Abkhazia. – *Investigations in the History of Abkhazia/Georgia*. Tbilisi, 1999, p. 61 /in Russian/.

² **M. Inadze.** Problems of the Ethnopolitical History of Ancient, p. 61.

³ **G. Turchaninov.** Monuments of writing and languages of the peoples of the Caucasus and Eastern Europe. Leningrad, 1971, in Russian; **Ia. Fedorov.** Historical ethnography of the North Caucasus. Moscow, 1983 /in Russian/.

foothills and the coastal area – were populated by Western Kartvelian tribes: Kols, Korakses, Colchis,¹ and probably Moskhis (Meskhis).² Ancient Greek authors (Hellanicos of Mytilene, 5th century B.C.) registered that at the same time the tribes of Heniochi lived in northwestern Colchis. According to contemporary historians, they lived in the area stretching from the vicinity of Pitiunt (contemporary Bichvinta-Pitsunda) to the Akheunta River (the Shakhe, at what is now Tuapse).³ Most people believe that the Heniochi were a Kartvelian (either Megrelo-Chan or Svan) tribe.⁴

¹ **M. Inadze.** Problems of the Ethno-Political History of Ancient Abkhazia, p. 61; **D. Muskhelishvili.** The Historic Status of Abkhazia in Georgia's Statehood. – *Investigations in the History of Abkhazia/Georgia*. Tbilisi, 1999, p. 115 /in Russian/.

² **M. Inadze.** Problems of the Ethno-Political History of Ancient Abkhazia, p. 67. It should be said that some Georgian historians (N. Lomouri is one of them) do not accept the fact that the Moskhs-Meskhs lived in northwestern Colchis (see: **N. Lomouri.** From the Ethnocultural History of Ancient Abkhazia. Tbilisi, 1998, pp. 20-30, in Georgian).

³ N. Lomouri alone disagrees with those who believe that the Geniokhs lived on the territory of contemporary Abkhazia (**N. Lomouri.** From the Ethnocultural History, pp. 10-20).

⁴ **I. Orbeli.** The City of the Twins “Dioscuria” and the Tribe of the Charioteers “Heniochi”. – *Journal of the Ministry of People Education*, April 1911, pp. 200, 208 /in Russian/; **N. Marr.** On the history of the term “Abkhaz”. – *Proceedings of the Academy of Sciences*, St. Petersburg, 1913, p. 327 /in Russian/; **P. Ingorokva.** Georgi Merchule – Georgian Writer of the 10th Century. Tbilisi, 1954, p. 135 /in Georgian/; **G. Melikishvili.** On the Ancient Population of Georgia, pp. 63-68; **G. Melikishvili.** On the issue of Ethnicity of the Population of Ancient Georgia. The Main Stages of the Ethno-Social Development of the Georgian People. – *Essays on the history of Georgia*, Vol. I, Tbilisi, 1989, p. 183 /in Russian/; **B. Gigineishvili.** On the Origins of the Heniochi Ethnonym. – *Proceedings of the Georgian Academy of Sciences*, History Series, No. 1, 1975, pp. 115-124 /in Georgian/; **M. Inadze.** Problems of the Ethno-Political History of Ancient Abkhazia, pp. 67-69; **D. Muskhelishvili.** The Historic Status, p. 117.

However, the ethnonym could serve as a blanket term for “tribes of various origins”.¹ It seems that those Abkhaz academics who speak of a genetic kinship between the Heniochi and ancient Abkhazs are wrong.²

In the 1st and 2nd centuries A.D., the ethnic map of northeastern Colchis changed under the pressure of new tribes: the Sanigs (who used to live between Sukhumi-Sebastopolis and what is now Gantiadi).³ Most of the academic community speaks of them as belonging to the Kartvelian ethnic world,⁴ even though it is thought that they may be of Abkaz-Adighe origin.⁵ The former offer the following argument:

1. The ethnonym “Sanigi” contains the easily identified root “sani” of the Megrelo-Chan origin – the Greek form of the ethnonym “Chani” („ჭანო“);⁶
2. The oldest Georgian name of Dioscuria – Sebastopolis (contemporary Sukhumi) – Tskhumi means “hornbeam” in the

¹ **M. Inadze.** Problems of the Ethno-Political History, p. 68.

² **Z. Anchabadze.** The History and Culture of Ancient Abkhazia, pp. 136-137, 173-176; **Sh. Inal-ipa.** Aspects of the ethnocultural history of the Abkhazians, p. 188.

³ **N. Lomouri.** From the Ethnocultural History, p. 31.

⁴ **I. Orbeli.** The City of the Twins “Dioscuria”, pp. 200-208; **N. Marr.** On the history of the term “Abkhaz”, p. 327; **S. Janashia.** Tabal-tubal, Tibareni, Iberi, pp. 11-15; **P. Ingorokva.** Georgi Merchule, p. 135; **G. Melikishvili.** On the Ancient Population of Georgia, p. 67; **M. Inadze.** Problems of the Ethno-Political History of Ancient Abkhazia, pp. 69-70; **N. Lomouri.** From the Ethnocultural History, pp. 30-34.

⁵ **Z. Anchabadze.** The history and culture of ancient Abkhazia, p. 132; **Z. Anchabadze.** From the History of Medieval Abkhazia. Sukhumi, 1959, pp. 15-16 /in Russian/; **Sh. Inal-ipa.** Aspects of the ethnocultural history of the Abkhazians, p. 35; **Yu. Voronov.** Ancient Abkhazian tribes in the Roman-Byzantine era. – In: *History of Abkhazia.* Tutorial. Ed. by **S. Lakoba.** Sukhumi, 1991, pp. 52-53, in Russian.

⁶ **N. Lomouri.** From the Ethnocultural History, p. 33.

Svan language.¹

A Svan toponym could have appeared in the vicinity of Sukhumi-Dioscuria only if the place was populated by Svans. Since after the 8th century (the earliest mention of the “city of Apshileti-Tskhumi” in a Georgian chronicle) Tskhumi was no longer a Svan city (it was a city of the Apshileti-Apsilia) and it is hard to detect traces of Svan tribes in the vicinity of Sukhumi. We can surmise that the Svan toponym of Sukhumi should be dated to the period before the 8th century. There is every reason to say that the Svan name of Sukhumi can be related to the period prior to the 1st century B.C. when, according to an ancient Greek geographer Strabo (64 B.C.-A.D. 20), “Svans dominated” the mountain peaks around Sukhumi-Dioscuria.² According to the virtually documentary evidence of Flavius Arrianus, another Greek author of the 2nd century A.D., “Sebastopolis was situated” on the lands of the Svans (that is, the Sanigs).³ Well-known information supplied by Claudius Ptolemy (2nd century A.D.) can serve as almost documentary confirmation that “Svano-Colchians”,⁴ a mixed Svano-Megrelian tribe of sorts,⁵ lived on the northern border of Colchis, to the northwest of Dioscuria, along the Korax River (the Bzyb in contemporary academic writings).

¹ One cannot exclude another interpretation of the Tskhumi toponym through the Megrelo-Zan language (“*tskhimuri*” and “*tkhumu*” in Megrelian also mean tree species – hornbeam and alder correspondingly).

² **T. Kauhchishvili.** Strabo’s “Geography” about Georgia. Tbilisi, 1957, p. 126 (in Georgian).

³ **Flavius Arrianus.** Travels around the Black Sea. Georgian translation, studies, commentaries and maps by **N. Kechakmadze.** Tbilisi, 1961, p. 43.

⁴ **N. Lomouri.** Claudius Ptolemy’s “Geography”. Information about Georgia. – In: *Materials on the History of Georgia and the Caucasus.* Issue 32, Tbilisi, 1955, pp. 43-44 (in Georgian).

⁵ **N. Lomouri.** Claudius Ptolemy’s “Geography”, pp. 43-44; **N. Lomouri.** From the Ethnocultural History of Ancient Abkhazia, p. 33.

Information about the Apsilae¹ and Abasgoi,² who probably lived on the territory between the rivers Galidzga and Kelasuri, first appeared in the written sources of the 1st-2nd centuries A.D.³ Later they moved to the northwest, and in the 5th-6th centuries A.D. were living somewhere in the Kodori (or the Kelasuri) and the Bzyb interfluve.⁴ In the 8th century, the city of Tskhumi acquired the new name of Apshileti (Apsilia). Historians ascribe the northward shift of the Abasgoi and Apsilae by the pressure of the Laz tribes.⁵

It was long believed that the Apsils and Abasgas were ancestors of the contemporary Abkhazs until a prominent Georgian philologist Pavlé Ingorokva revised the earlier ideas in the 1950s and argued that the Abasg-"Abkhazs" and Apsils of the Early Middle Ages were Kartvelian tribes.⁶ Official Georgian historiography, however, and particularly its leader of that time, Academician N. Berdzenishvili, treated P. Ingorokva's hypothesis with a lot of

¹ **Pliny the Elder**. The Natural History. VI, 12; **V. Latyshev**. Proceedings ancient writers Greek and Latin the Scythia and Caucasus. – *Bulletin of Ancient History*, #2, 1949, pp. 290-291; **Flavius Arrianus**. Travels around the Black Sea, pp. 42-45.

² **Flavius Arrianus**. Travels around the Black Sea, pp. 42-45.

³ **N. Lomouri**. From the Ethnocultural History of Ancient Abkhazia, p. 33. Recently Academician D. Muskhelishvili offered a different localization (see: **D. Muskhelishvili**. The Historic Status, p. 118).

⁴ **G. Melikishvili**. Georgia in the 1st – 3rd Centuries A.D. – In: *Essays on the History of Georgia*, Vol. I. Tbilisi, 1970, pp. 545-546 (in Georgian); **N. Lomouri**. From the Ethnocultural, p. 33. N. Lomouri believes that some of the Apsils could also have "stayed behind" on the territory to the east of the Kodori (see: **N. Lomouri**. Abkhazia in the Late Antique and Early Medieval Epochs. – *Investigations in the History of Abkhazia/Georgia*. Tbilisi, 1999, p. 95 /in Russian/.

⁵ **G. Melikishvili**. Georgia in the 1st – 3rd Centuries, pp. 545-546; **N. Lomouri**. From the Ethnocultural History of Ancient Abkhazia, p. 33.

⁶ **P. Ingorokva**. Georgi Merchule, pp. 118-189.

caution and preferred the old interpretation.¹ This is confirmed by all the general works on the history of Georgia-Abkhazia published in the 1950s-1980s starting with *Essays on the History of Abkhazian ASSR* and ending with textbooks and other teaching aids on the history of Georgia (including *History of Georgia*, a textbook for students, ed. by Academician N. Berdzenishvili, Vol. I, Tbilisi, 1958, in Georgian) and the main work: eight volumes of a fundamental publication called *Essays on the History of Georgia* (ed. Academician G. Melikishvili) which never contested the idea that the Abasg-Apsils belonged to the Abkhaz-Adighe ethnic world. P. Ingorokva was severely criticized by Abkhaz scholars.² Recently some Georgian historians have been carried away by the idea of reviving P. Ingorokva's hypothesis at all costs; so far they have not succeeded.

The problem of the ethnic identity of the Abasg-Apsils requires clarification of the terms "Abasg", "Abkhaz", "Abaza", and "Apsil" on the one hand, and "Apsar" and "Apsua" on the other. It was believed for a long time that the ethnonyms "Abasg", "Abkhaz", and "Abaza" were identical.³ The latter was associated with

¹ **N. Berdzenishvili.** About the Book by Pavel Ingorokva "Giorgi Merchule". – *Mnatobi*, Georgian Journal, №12, 1956, pp. 125-131 /in Georgian/.

² **Z. Anchabadze.** Questions of the History of Abkhazia in the Book of P. Ingorokva "George Merchule – Georgian Writer of the 10th century." – In: *Proceedings of the Abkhazian Institute of Language, Literature and History*, vol. XXVII. Sukhumi, 1956, pp. 261-278 /in Russian/; **Kh. Bgzhba.** Some Issues of Ethnonymy and Toponymy of Abkhazia (In Connection with the Work of P. Ingorokva "George Merchule"). – In: *Proceedings of the Abkhazian Institute of Language, Literature and History*. Vol. XXVII. Sukhumi, 1956, pp. 279-303 /in Russian/; **Sh. Inal-ipa.** Aspects of the ethnocultural history, pp. 50-51, 406.

³ **K. Lomtadze.** On the Origin of the Ethnonym "Abasg". – In: *Theses of the XLIX Scientific Conference of the Institute of Linguistics*. Tbilisi, 1990, pp. 19-20 /in Georgian/; **O. Kakhadze.** About the Root Abkhaz/

the “Apsua” ethnonym, which is believed to be derived from the phonetically kindred “Abaza”.¹ Recently Academician T. Gamkrelidze voiced his serious doubts about the identity of the terms “Abasg” and “Abaza,” which he believes to be two independent terms. The Greek form “Abasg” is derived from the Georgian “Abkhaz,” by which he means not the ancestors of “Abaza”-“Apsua,” but a Western Kartvelian tribe.² Today, the identical nature of the ethnonyms “Apsil”, “Apsar”, and “Apsua” is doubted. According to Academician D. Muskhelishvili, “Apsil” cannot be regarded as an equivalent of “Apsua” and the term “Apsilae” applies to a West Georgian tribe.³

The early Medieval written sources mention the Misimian tribes living on the territory of contemporary Abkhazia (in the Kodori Gorge, beyond the Tsebelda). They obviously belonged to the Kartvelian (Svan) ethnic world since the Misimian ethnonym goes back to “Mushvan”, the Svans’ self-name. The efforts of certain Abkhaz historians to detach the Misimians, together with the Sanigheniochi, from the Kartvelian ethnic world have nothing to do with strict academic logic. In the early Middle Ages, the Lazs also inhabited the territory of Abkhazia. They probably lived mainly in its southern areas, but we cannot exclude that some of them lived

Abhaza. – In: *The foreign Definitions of Georgia and the Georgians*. Tbilisi, 1993, pp. 551-564 /in Georgian/; **E. Osidze**. On the Origin of the Ethnonyms Abask/Abas. – In: *The foreign Definitions of Georgia and the Georgians*. Tbilisi, 1993, pp. 565-570 /in Georgian/; **T. Gvantseladze**. Once again on the Ethnonym Abkhaz and Related with It Roots. – In: *The foreign Definitions of Georgia and the Georgians*. Tbilisi, 1993, pp. 571-580 /in Georgian/.

¹ **T. Gamkrelidze**. On the history of Old Tribal Names of Colchis. – *Proceedings of the Georgian Academy of Sciences, History Series, No. 2, 1992*, pp. 7-16 /in Georgian/.

² **T. Gamkrelidze**. On the history of Old Tribal Names, pp. 7-16.

³ **D. Muskhelishvili**. The Historic Status of Abkhazia, pp. 122-123.

in the north (this is confirmed by the Old Lazika toponym that specialists localize at the mouth of the Negopsukho River, to the northwest of modern Tuapse).¹

It means that starting around mid-first millennium B.C., we already have written Ancient Greek data on the ethnic situation in northwestern Colchis of those times. The territory of contemporary Abkhazia was inhabited only by Kartvelian (Colchian) tribes (Kols, Korakses, Colchians themselves, Heniochi, and possibly Moskhis-Meskhis). At the same time, the ethnonym “Colchians” could have been a blanket term extended to other Kartvelian and non-Kartvelian (the Abkhazo-Adighe tribes included) tribes. Starting in the 1st-2nd centuries, the Apsils and Abasgas (most believe that they were the ancestors of the contemporary Abkhazs) were registered on the territory of contemporary Abkhazia. It should be said that both occupied a limited area (at the first stage – in the 1st-2nd A.D. – somewhere between the rivers of Galidzga and Kelasuri). Later, by the 5th-6th centuries, they moved up north and settled between the rivers of Kodori (or Kelasuri) and Bzyb in the territory of contemporary Abkhazia. The Georgian tribes of Sanigs, Misimians, and Lazs comprised the bulk of the population living both in the south and in the north. We should emphasize that **it is unimportant whether or not the Apsils and Abasgas were ancestors of the contemporary Abkhazs, or whether contemporary Abkhazia was their original homeland. What is important is the fact that the Abkhaz-Adighe and Kartvelian (mainly Megrelo-Chan) tribes contributed to the emergence of the Abkhaz ethnos formed in the territory of contemporary Abkhazia.**

It is equally obvious that **from early antiquity to the 8th century (with short intervals) northwestern Colchis, or the territory of contemporary Abkhazia, remained part of the**

¹ D. Muskhelishvili. The Historic Status of Abkhazia, p. 118.

West Georgian (first the Colchian and then Laz -Egrisi) political and state structures and that Abkhazs' political and state activities proceeded within this expanse.

It is thought that the earliest states appeared on Georgian territory at least in the late second millennium B.C. It was at that time that Assyrian cuneiform texts first mentioned the “countries” of Daiaeni (later Diaukhi in the Urartu sources) and Kilkhi, identified as Kolkha (Colchis) of the Argonauts period. About the 7th-6th centuries B.C. another state appeared in Western Georgia on the ruins of the Colchian alliance headed, according to Ancient Greek authors, by descendants of the legendary king Aeëtes; it is surmised that its northwestern border should be sought in the vicinity of contemporary Tuapse, where Old Lazika was situated in the past. This clearly suggests that the territory of contemporary Abkhazia was part of the Colchian kingdom as an “organic ethnical and territorial sector” of the Colchian state.¹ It seems that the opposite opinion (about an independent Abkhaz national state unit)² is unfounded.

By the early 1st century B.C. there was no longer a united state in Colchis; it is commonly believed that the tribes united under the Colchian king had regained their independence by that time.³ It was at that time that Mithridates VI of Pontus had gained control over the territory of historical Colchis; in 65 B.C. Rome arrived in these places to establish its hegemony. In the 1st-2nd centuries A.D., new ethnopolitical units appeared in the territory of historical Colchis – the so-called kingdoms of Makrons and Heniochi, Lazs, Apsilae, Abasgoi, and Sanigs. The territory of contemporary Abkhazia was divided among Lazika (approximately up to the River Galidzga), Apsilia and Abasgia (approximately between

¹ **D. Muskhelishvili.** The Historic Status of Abkhazia, p. 119.

² **Yu. Voronov.** Abkhazians – who are they, p. 21.

³ **D. Muskhelishvili.** The Historic Status of Abkhazia, p. 119.

the rivers of Galidzga and Kelasuri), and Sanigia with the city of Sebastopolis (contemporary Sukhumi), which stretched to Sochi or even to Tuapse.¹ **This means that the larger part of contemporary Abkhazia was occupied by the states of the Sanigs and Lazs (the tribes whose Kartvelian origin is no longer contested). Only the kingdoms of the Apsilae and Abasgoi can possibly be described as Abkhaz ethno-political units.**

These were early class state units headed by dynasts appointed or endorsed by Rome. Around the 3rd century, the Kingdom of Lazika supported by the Roman authorities started establishing its hegemony in Western Georgia. **By the late 4th century it had already spread throughout the entire territory (including contemporary Abkhazia) and become a fairly strong Laz Kingdom (Egrisi Kingdom) described by contemporary Byzantine authors as a legal heir to the ancient Colchian Kingdom. At that time (6th century A.D.) the territory of what is now Abkhazia remained an organic part of the Lazika-Egrisi state even though the rulers of Abasgia (found at that time within new borders – probably between the Gumista and Bzyb rivers) enjoyed a great share of sovereignty and merely formally accepted the Laz kings as their sovereigns. Apsilia, in turn, remained an administrative part of Lazika and was ruled by officials appointed from the centre.**

In the 5th-6th centuries, the Byzantine Empire, which was seeking greater loyalty from the Las kings, encouraged the Abasgian rulers' desire to shift their subordination from Lazika to the empire. It was probably at that time (first half of the 6th century) that the Byzantine authorities separated Abasgia and Egrisi religiously by setting up a diocese in Abasgia independent of the

¹ **G. Melikishvili.** Georgia in the 1st – 3rd Centuries, pp. 545-546; **M. Inadze.** Problems of the Ethno-Political History of Ancient Abkhazia, p. 61; **N. Lomouri.** From the Ethnocultural History, p. 33.

Las metropolitan. This and the political tension in Western Georgia caused by the Iranian-Byzantine war that had been going on for twenty years interfered with the political consolidation of the Egrisi state. A period of gradual decline set in. Throughout the second half of the 6th and first half of the 7th centuries, the Byzantine Empire was increasing its pressure on the central power of Lasika-Egrisi in an attempt to cut down its influence in the provinces. **In the mid-7th century, however, Apsilia and Misimiania still remained under the direct control of the Lazika rulers; one of their residences was found at Mokvi** (now the Ochamchire area).¹

Such was the political and state makeup of Western Georgia-Abkhazia between the first millennium B.C. and about the early 8th century A.D. The quoted data testify beyond doubt that throughout this long period the territory of contemporary Abkhazia (politically and administratively) was part of the Georgian political and state entity. In the 6th-1st centuries B.C. it was part of the Colchian Kingdom. In the 4th century A.D., after a short interval of independence, small ethno-political units of Sanigs, Abasgoi, and Apsilae and later of Misimians that had sprung into existence at the turn of the 2nd century A.D. found themselves once more within a united Western Georgian state, the Laz Kingdom, where they remained almost until the early 8th century. Abasgia, which the Byzantine Empire had earlier (in the 6th century) removed from Lazika jurisdiction, was the only exception.

¹ From the memoirs of Theodosius of Gangra in: *Georgika*. Information Supplied by Byzantine Authors about Georgia. The Georgian text was published and commented on by **S. Kaukhchishvili**. Vol. IV, Part 1. Tbilisi, 1941, p. 50; **T. Papuashvili**. Relations between the Georgians and the Abkhazs against the Background of the Political Situation in Egrisi and Abkhazia in the 7th-8th centuries. – In: **G. Amichba, T. Papuashvili**. From the History of the Joint Struggle of the Georgians and the Abkhazs against Foreign Invaders (6th-8th centuries). Tbilisi, 1985, p. 58 /in Russian/.

The “Abkhazs” Kingdom was a Georgian State

While the Laz-Egrisi Kingdom was gradually losing its former influence after the twenty-year-long (542-562) Iranian-Byzantine confrontation, Abasgia-Abkhazia was gaining strength in Western Georgia with the help of the Byzantine Empire. By the mid-730s, when famous Arabian warlord Marwan ibn-Muhammad (later caliph Marwan II) burst into Western Georgia with a punitive expedition, there was no local dynast there. Lazika-Egrisi was considered part of the Kartli Saerismtavro (Principality). The borders of the state (which the sources for the first time called “*Sakartvelo*” („საქართველო“/Georgia)¹ ran along the Kelasuri River, beyond which lay Abkhazia, a Byzantine possession ruled by the emperor-appointed *Eristavi* (governor of a province in Medieval Georgia).

The old Georgian historical tradition associates the Marwan the Deaf (as Marwan ibn-Muhammad was called in Georgia) expedition to Western Georgia and its results with the changes in the country’s political and state structures. The Byzantine Empire, in particular, officially recognized Mihr and Archil, members of the ruling House of Kartli, as leaders of Georgia and kings of Kartli-Egrisi and made Leon, *Eristavi* of Abkhazia, a hereditary ruler of Abkhazia.² It was at the same time that Caesar’s *Eristavi* Leon

¹ **Juansher Juansheriani.** The Life of Vakhtang Gorgasali. – *Kartlis Tskhovreba*. Georgian text based on the main manuscripts prepared by **S. Kaukhchishvili**. Vol. I. Tbilisi, 1955, p. 235; **Juansher Juansheriani.** The Life of Vakht’ang Gorgasali. Translated and with commentary: **Dmitri Gamq’relidze**. – *Kartlis Tskhovreba /A History of Georgia/*. Editor in Chief of the Georgian and Russian editions: Academician **Roin Metrevel-i**; Editor in Chief of the English edition: **Professor Stephen Jones**. *Artanuji Publishing*. Tbilisi 2014, p. 111 (<http://science.org.ge/old/books/Kartlis%20cxovreba/Kartlis%20Cxovreba%202012%20Eng.pdf>).

² **Juansher Juansheriani.** The Life of Vakhtang Gorgasali. – *Kartlis Tskhovreba*. Georgian text, pp. 239-240; **Juansher Juansheriani.** The

married one of Mihr's daughters, thus bringing the two ruling houses closer.¹ Leon also became an equal member of the ruling House of Kartli-Egrisi. The Abkhazian ruler went even further: he declined Archil's offer of territorial possessions, who became the only official ruler of Kartli-Egrisi upon the death of Mihr, the elder of the two brothers, and announced himself a vassal of the Kartli *Erismtavari* and his possessions as part of the state of King Archil. He was lavishly recompensed in the political respect with a royal crown the Byzantine emperor sent to his father-in-law Mihr.² This pushed the Abkhazian ruler to the forefront of Georgian politics and made him de facto the second important person in the state after King Archil. His political career received a fresh impetus.

In this way, in the 730s, Georgia received a new political and state context. **Eastern and Western Georgia, including the territory to the north of the Kelasuri (that is, Abkhazia of that time), was legally united into one state headed by erismtavari Archil of the House of Kartli.**³

Life of Vakht'ang Gorgasali. Translated and with commentary: **Dmitri Gamq'relidze**, p. 112-113.

¹ **Juansher Juansheriani**. The Life of Vakhtang Gorgasali. – *Kartlis Tskhovreba*. Georgian text, pp. 242-243; **Juansher Juansheriani**. The Life of Vakht'ang Gorgasali. Translated and with commentary: **Dmitri Gamq'relidze**, p. 113-114.

² **Juansher Juansheriani**. The Life of Vakhtang Gorgasali. – *Kartlis Tskhovreba*. Georgian text, p. 243; **Juansher Juansheriani**. The Life of Vakht'ang Gorgasali. Translated and with commentary: **Dmitri Gamq'relidze**, p. 14.

³ For more detail, see: **Z. Papaskiri**. Byzantine Diplomacy and Political Changes in Western Georgia in the First Half of the 8th Century. – In: *Georgian Diplomacy. An Annual*. Vol. IV. Tbilisi, 1997, pp. 300-308 (in Georgian); **Z. Papaskiri**. From Political History of Western Georgia-Abkhazia. – In: **Z. Papaskiri**. Abkhazia is Georgia. Tbilisi, 1998, pp. 114-120 /in Georgian/.

By the late 8th century, Leon II, another member of the House of Leon, nephew of Leon, skillfully used the growing weakness of the Byzantine Empire to detach his state from it with the help of the Khazars; he usurped power in the Egrisi-Abkhazeti state unified by his predecessor and announced himself the king of the “Abkhazs”.¹ This was how the so-called “Abkhazs” kingdom came into being. It should be said that the early Georgian historical tradition unequivocally associated this act with a dynastic crisis in the royal House of Archil. According to the anonymous author of *Matiane Kartlisa* (an 11th century chronicle), Leon II succeeded merely because “*Iovane was dead and Juansher had grown old. Then Juansher died too*”.² Since Leon II, the *Eristavi* of Abkhazia, called himself king of the “Abkhazs” (“*mepe apkhazta*” – „მეფე აფხაზთა“) both inside and outside Georgia, the new state became known as the country of the king of the “Abkhazs,” that is, the Kingdom of the “Abkhazs,” or simply Abkhazia. The changed name did not mean that the country also changed its national-political makeup or that an absolutely new Abkhaz national state proper appeared within the limits of Western Georgia, claimed by the unrecognized Republic of Abkhazia of our days as its legal predecessor. In fact, it is the contemporary Georgian state that is the legal heir to it.

¹ *Matiane Kartlisa*. – *Kartlis Tskhovreba*. Georgian text based on the main manuscripts prepared by **S. Kaukhchishvili**. Vol. I. Tbilisi, 1955, p. 251; *Matiane Kartlisa (The Chronicle of Kartli)*. Translated and with commentary: **Arrian Chanturia**. – *Kartlis Tskhovreba /A History of Georgia/*. Editor in Chief of the Georgian and Russian editions: Academician **Roin Metreveli**; Editor in Chief of the English edition: Professor **Stephen Jones**. Artanuji Publishing. Tbilisi 2014, p. 142 (<http://science.org.ge/old/books/Kartlis%20cxovreba/Kartlis%20Cxovreba%202012%20Eng.pdf>).

² *Matiane Kartlisa*. – *Kartlis Tskhovreba*. Georgian text, p. 251; *Matiane Kartlisa (The Chronicle of Kartli)*. Translated and with commentary: **Arrian Chanturia**, p. 142; **Z. Anchabadze**. From the History of Medieval Abkhazia, p. 98.

There is any number of countries whose names do not correspond to their content: Bulgaria, for example, got its name from its founder Bulgarian Khan Asparukh who moved from Volga Bulgaria to the Balkans.¹ Kievan Rus is another example: it has been recognized that the country's name is of Scandinavian origin, which it acquired from founders Oleg, Riurik, and others, who were Normans.² Even the most zealous supporters of the so-called Norman theory would agree that from the very beginning Kievan Rus was a purely Slavic not a Norman-Scandinavian state. The same can be said about the Spanish precedent: when in 1700 Duke of Anjou, grandson of King of the French Louis XIV, was put on the Spanish throne as Philip V, the Spanish state did not become France.³

¹ **S. Nikitin.** Asparukh. The Formation of the Bulgarian People and the Emergence of the Bulgarian State. – *Bulletin of the Moscow State University*, 1, 1952 /in Russian/.

² Recently, the idea that the tribe of Rus was of Slavic origin was called, quite rightly, a “historiographic myth” that “is no longer a ‘historical fact’” (**V. Petrukhin.** Slavs, Varangians and Khazars in the South of Rus. To the Problem of the Formation of the Territory of the Ancient Russian State. – In: *The Ancient States of Eastern Europe*, 1992-1993. Moscow, 1995 /in Russian/, available at <http://norse.ulver.com/articles/petruhin/slavs.html>).

³ The fact that the origins of the ruling dynasty are unimportant for the country's national and state image is confirmed by Georgia's political practice. For example, in about 1039, Kvirike III, the first king of Kakheti-Hereti, was replaced on the throne after his death by his nephew (son of his sister) Gagik, member of the Tashir-Dzoraket Armenian dynasty (see: *Matiane Kartlisa*. – *Kartlis Tskhovreba*. Georgian text, p. 297. *Matiane Kartlisa (The Chronicle of Kartli)*. Translated and with commentary: **Arrian Chanturia**, p. 155; **Prince Vakhushti.** Description of Georgian Kingdom. – *Kartlis Tskhovreba (A History of Georgia)*, Vol. IV. The Georgian text prepared according to all the main manuscripts by **S. Kaukhchishvili**. Tbilisi, 1973, p. 562), but this did not make the Kakheti kingdom an Armenian state.

For the same reason, separatist historiography is wrong when it insists that the Kingdom of “Abkhazs”, the national state of the Apsua-Abkhazs, appeared as a result of the military victories of the ruler of Abkhazia in Western Georgia.¹ If the “Abkhaz” dynasty came to power in the former Laz-Egrisi Kingdom as a foreign force that occupied the neighboring territory and imposed an alien Abkhaz statehood on the local Georgian population, one would be left wondering why the medieval Georgian public and political mentality accepted the act of aggression peacefully and painlessly. Even a superficial reader of the monuments of Old Georgian historical literature cannot fail to note that all medieval Georgian authors and chroniclers described the kings of the “Abkhazs” and their activities in the most favourable terms. Indeed, could the patriotically minded author of the *“Chronicle of Kartli”*, the only more or less exhaustive source on the history of the Kingdom of the “Abkhazs” that fully reflects the Georgian (let me repeat – **Georgian**) rather than the imaginary Abkhaz-Apsua national-state reality, flatter and praise the frightening “Abkhaz” kings who had allegedly conquered Georgia?

An explanation suggests itself: **the Georgian public looked at the king of the “Abkhazs” not as aliens or conquerors, but as their own leaders like, for example, members of the Bagrationi dynasty. This was one common Georgian cultural, political, and state universe ruled for a while by a new “Abkhaz” dynasty. No matter who Leon II and his descendants were in the ethnic and tribal respect (they might even have been ethnic Abkhazs), this means nothing since in the political and state respect the dynasty of the Leonids represented a common Georgian state, cultural, and political world.**

¹ **M. Gunba.** Abkhazia in the First Millennium A.D. Socio-Economical and Political Relations. Sukhumi, 1989, pp. 234-244 /in Russian/.

Leon II and his descendants were building up a Georgian, not an Abkhaz-Apsua state; this is confirmed by their policy in the religious sphere. After gaining state independence, the Leonids spared no effort to leave the ideological and confessional sphere of Byzantium and set up a national state ideology, a task that could not be accomplished without severing church ties with the empire. They finally gained independence from Byzantium in the religious sphere and set up a so-called “Abkhazian” Catholicosate.¹ After acquiring Church independence, the kings of the “Abkhazs” plunged into hectic activities: among other things they founded new church centres and encouraged Georgian written culture and Georgian Christian literacy across Western Georgia, and on the territory of contemporary Abkhazia.² Simultaneously they replaced the old Greek dioceses with newly established Georgian episcopal thrones.

It was thanks to this obviously Georgian national policy of the kings of the “Abkhazs” in the religious sphere that by the 10th

¹ For more detail, see: **Z. Papaskiri**. On the Question of Dating the “Abkhaz” Catholicosate. – In: *Shota Meskhia – 90*. Jubilee Volume dedicated to the 90th anniversary of **Shota Meskhia**. Tbilisi, 2006, pp. 201-213 (in Georgian).

² It should be pointed out that the earliest Georgian inscription was found not in the eastern areas of Western Georgia (somewhere in Imereti), but on the territory of what is now Abkhazia. I have in mind the inscription in Asomtavruli in a church in Msigkhua (the Gudauta District) found by Abkhazian academic A. Katsia (see **A. Katsia**. Monuments of Architecture in the valley of Tskhuara. – In: *Materials on the Archaeology of Abkhazia*. Sukhumi, 1967 /in Russian/), dated back to the 9th-10th centuries (The *Corpus of Georgian Inscriptions*. Vol. II. Compiled by **V. Silogava**. Tbilisi, 1980, pp. 31-32; **V. Silogava**. The Georgian Epigraphy of Samegrelo-Abkhazia. Tbilisi, 2004, pp. 258-259, in Georgian; **L. Akhaladze**. Epigraphic Monuments of Abkhazia. – In: *Investigations in the History of Abkhazia/Georgia*. Tbilisi, 1999, p. 364 /in Russian/; **L. Akhaladze**. Abkhazian Epigraphy as a Historical Source. V. I. *Lapidary and mural inscriptions*. Tbilisi, 2005, pp. 140-146, in Georgian.

century (not the 11th or 12th centuries) Western Georgia as a whole (complete with the territory of contemporary Abkhazia) became a country of Georgian written culture and literacy. If the “Abkhazs” kings intended to build an Abkhaz-Apsua national state, they would have looked after the Abkhaz-Apsua national ideology, which would have required Abkhaz written tradition and literature. They never posed themselves this task; for some reason, they opposed the Greco-Byzantine ideology to the Georgian national ideology represented by the Georgian Church.

This suggests the only explanation: Leon II and his ancestors, to say nothing of his descendants (despite their possible Abkhaz-Apsua ethnic origins), considered themselves to be part of the common Georgian state, cultural, and political world even before Leon II came to power.¹ They treated the Georgian language used by the Eastern Georgians (Kart) that formed the foundation of the Georgian literary tongue as well as Georgian Christian culture as their own in the same way as they were treated by the rest of the Kartvelian population of Western Georgia, including the Megrelo-Chans and Svans who spoke (and are still using now) their own dialects.

Even if we admit, for the sake of argument, that the kings of the “Abkhazs” did have a narrow Abkhaz national and state mentality, at least at the early stages of the history of their state, their obvious political ambitions would have forced them to take into account the national and state interests of the population’s

¹ The fact that the territory of contemporary Abkhazia and its population lived together, in one state, with the rest of Western Georgia for at least one and a half millennium was probably also important. At first, this was the Colchian kingdom (the 6th-2nd centuries B.C.), followed in the 1st-2nd centuries A.D. by new ethnic units in the territory of contemporary Abkhazia – the kingdoms of Apsils, Abasgs and Sanigs. Around the 4th century they were reunited into the Laz kingdom, where they remained until the 730s.

absolute majority and to steer toward a Georgian (not an Abkhaz-Apsua) state. No reasonable-minded person would contest the fact that the Kartvelian tribes were in the majority in the state. Indeed, of the eight *eristavis* of the “Abkhazs” kingdom set up (according to the old historical tradition created by Prince Vakhushti)¹ by Leon II, only the lands to the north of the Gumista were populated by ethnic Abkhazs. Their area stretched to Nikopsia (to the north of the city of Tuapse of our times); small numbers of them might have lived in Tskhumi *Saeristavo*. All the other *Saeristavos*, the Tskhumi *Saeristavo* included, were the home of the Kartvelian tribes (the Meglero-Chans, Svans, and Karts).

According to Z. Anchabadze, one of the best specialists on the history of Abkhazia,² the Kartvelian ethnic element, especially the Karts (the numerical strength of whom had considerably increased in Western Georgia by the 8th century), turned out to be more advanced in the socio-economic and especially cultural respect. This made the language of the Karts (that is, the Georgian literary language) with a writing tradition of its own used for a long time as the state tongue and the language of church services in Eastern and Southern Georgia the state language of the Kingdom of the “Abkhazs”.

More than that, the kings of the “Abkhazs” named Kutaisi, the residence of the Kartli *erismtavaris* in the 730s, as their capital, not Tsikhe-Goji, the residence of the Laz-Egrisi kings. This testifies to the outstanding role of the Kart (East Georgian) element in Western Georgia. The Leonids obviously regarded themselves as the legal heirs to the royal House of Stepanos-Archil; by moving the capital from Anakopia (the residence of the *eristavis* of Abkhazia) to Kutaisi, Leon II obviously intended to confirm his legal position as a member of the House of Archil.

¹ **Prince Vakhushti.** Description of Georgian Kingdom, p. 796.

² **Z. Anchabadze.** From the History, pp. 106-108.

This means that **the Kingdom of the “Abkhazs” was a new West Georgian state**¹ that appeared on the ruins of the Lasika-Egrisi state. **Moreover, the appearance of the “Abkhazs” kingdom opened a qualitatively new stage in the history of Georgian statehood. As distinct from its immediate predecessor (to say nothing of ancient Colchis), the national-state development of which stopped halfway** (the Greek language was used for official papers and church services), **the “Abkhazs” Kingdom can be described as the first genuinely Georgian national state in Western Georgia with a Georgian Christian ideology and Georgian state language. Its political course was likewise Georgian: the state was firm when it came to common Georgian political and state interests.** The consistent efforts of the Kutaisi rulers who painstakingly extended and strengthened their kingdom finally led, in the early 11th century, to a united Georgian state under the aegis of the kings of the “Abkhazs.”

***The Territory of Contemporary Abkhazia
as Part of the United Georgian Monarchy
in the 11th-15th Centuries***

The long process of unification of the Georgian lands was finally completed at the turn of the 11th century when a single state headed by King of the “Abkhazs” and “Kartvels” Bagrat III Bagrationi was formed. This means that the two states – the “Abkhazian” (Western Georgian) and “Kartvelian” (Tao-Klarjeti, a South Georgian state going back to the early 9th century) – were united. The title of the king of the unified Georgian state started with “King of the “Abkhazs” to emphasize the leading role of the West Georgian state – the Kingdom of the “Abkhazs” – in the unification

¹ **Z. Anchabadze.** The Abkhaz Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic. Historical essay. – In: *Georgian Soviet Encyclopedia*. Special volume: Georgian SSR. Tbilisi, 1981, p. 324 /in Russian/.

process. It was the Kutaisi throne that gathered all the Georgian lands and created a common Georgian statehood; this had nothing to do with the change of dynasties since Prince Bagrat ascended the West Georgian throne not as a Bagrationi, but as a legitimate member (on his mother's side) of the Leonid dynasty. He was the grandson (son of a daughter) of Giorgi II (922-957), the most outstanding among the kings of the "Abkhazs."

Under Bagrat III the Kingdom of the "Abkhazs" remained practically the same in the ethnopolitical and state-legal respect; it merely expanded to the rest of the Georgian territory (except for the Tbilisi Emirate and the southern part of Tao that belonged to David Curopalate) and became a Georgian state. In the 11th and 12th centuries, all the Georgian chroniclers called their country (Georgia) Abkhazia, mostly without offering comments. The same can be said of foreign sources, which, when dealing with the events of the 11th-12th centuries, used the term "Abkhazia" (Abasgia, Obezi, etc.) to describe Georgia and the united Georgian state.¹

No matter how hard certain researchers are looking for elements of national Abkhaz statehood and a sort of autonomy inside the common Georgian state of the 11th-12th century,² the territory of contemporary Abkhazia was not a single national unit. Since the time of Leon II, founder of the "Abkhazs" kingdom, it was divided into *saeristavos*: **Abkhazian** (the northern part approximately from the River Gumista or Anakopia (present-day New Athos) to Nikopsia (to the north of modern Tuapse), **Tskhumi** (part of what is now the Gudauta District up to Anakopia, the Sukhumi and Gulripsh districts, and part of the Ochamchire District), and **Bedia**

¹ For more detail, see: **Z. Papaskiri**. The Territory of Abkhazia in the 11th-15th centuries. – In: *Investigations in the History of Abkhazia/Georgia*. Tbilisi, 1999, pp. 182-184 /in Russian/.

² **Yu. Voronov**. Abkhazians – who are they, p. 8.

(part of the Ochamchire and Gali districts).¹ Throughout the 11th-12th centuries, the Abkhazs were involved in the military-political acts of the Georgian state; they fought all the battles and were not different from the rest of the population of the single Georgian state.

According to a prominent Abkhaz historian and ethnographer Sh. Inal-ipa, the territory of contemporary Abkhazia within the unified Georgian state “was anything but a forgotten province”.² In the 11th-12th centuries, the Georgian kings could always rely on the *eristavis* on the territory of what is now Abkhazia in their struggle against the feudal opposition. It stands to reason that Bagrat III, the first king of united Georgia, selected Bedia (in the Ochamchire District) as one (or even the main) of his residences where he built a sumptuous temple to serve as his tomb. There are no facts to support the allegations of certain historians³ about the anti-governmental or even separatist-minded Abkhaz feudal lords who resented the liquidation of the “Abkhazs” kingdom. The opposite looks more plausible: they were the most loyal subjects of the kings of united Georgia, who called themselves kings of the “Abkhazs”. At all times the Abkhaz nobility played an important role at the royal court in Kutaisi and Tbilisi (where David IV the Builder moved his capital). The *saeristavos* in the Abkhazian territory (the Tskhumi *Saeristavo* in particular) became even more important. The city of Tskhumi-Sokhumi became the summer residence of the Georgian kings. According to well-

¹ **Z. Anchabadze.** From the History of Medieval Abkhazia, pp. 106-108.

² **Sh. Inal-ipa.** Aspects of the ethnocultural history of the, p. 411.

³ **Z. Anchabadze.** From the History of Medieval Abkhazia, p. 178; **Sh. Inal-ipa.** Aspects of the ethnocultural history of the Abkhazians, p. 412; **G. Tsulaia.** Abkhazia and Abkhazians in the Context of the History of Georgia. *The pre-Mongol period.* Moscow, 1995, p. 122 /in Russian/.

known Russian academic V. Sizov, it became an important “*cultural and administrative center of the Georgian state*”.¹

In the 11th-12th centuries, the territory of contemporary Abkhazia was an area of Georgian Christian culture. By that time numerous Christian churches had been built. The Bedia Cathedral erected by King Bagrat III, who united Georgia, and the Bagrati Cathedral in Kutaisi were symbols of the united Georgian state.² The Lykhny Cathedral (built at the turn of the 11th century) and the Bichvinta (Pitsunda) Cathedral (12th century) are the outstanding monuments of Georgian Christian architecture. The Christian churches in the territory of contemporary Abkhazia were centres of Georgian literacy and enlightenment. At that time, the region’s written culture was exclusively Georgian; nearly all surviving inscriptions dated to the 11th and 12th centuries carved in stone are in Georgian,³ which means that in the 11th-12th centuries Abkhazia wholly and entirely was a country of the Georgian Medieval Christian culture.

In the 13th century, Georgia’s military-political might have been undermined first by the devastating inroads of Khwarazmian Shah Jalal ad-Din and then by the Mongolian conquerors who disrupted the unified Georgian state. In the 1240s, Mongols divided Georgia into eight military-administrative sectors (Tumens), two of which were found in Western Georgia. The territory of contemporary Abkhazia formed part of the Tumen administered by Tsoetne Dadiani, while the local population (including the ethnic

¹ **V. Sizov.** East Coast of the Black Sea. – *Materials on the Archaeology of the Caucasus*, Issue II. Moscow, 1889, p. 49 /in Russian/.

² For more detail, see: **Z. Papaskiri.** The Bedia Cathedral as a Symbol of United Georgian Statehood. – In: *Historical Researches, Annual of Abkhazian Organization of Ekvtime Takaishvili Georgian Historical Society*, vol. III. Tbilisi, 2000, pp. 3-9 /in Georgian/, available at [<https://sites.google.com/site/saistoriodziebani/dziebani2000/>].

³ **Z. Anchabadze.** From the History of Medieval Abkhazia, p. 8.

“Abkhazs”) was still actively involved in the common Georgian processes. It was with their support that David son of Rusudan became “*the King of the **Abkhazs up to Likhi***”.¹ From that time on (the latter half of the 13th century), the united Georgian state de facto was divided into two kingdoms: Eastern Georgia was ruled by David Ulu, son of Giorgi Lasha, while David Narin set up an independent state in Western Georgia (Likht-Imereti) that survived until the late 1320s. The territory of contemporary Abkhazia belonged to the latter.

The death of David Narin in 1293 triggered squabbles in Western Georgia that allowed Giorgi Dadiani, *Eristavi* of Odishi (Samegrelo) to “*gain control over the Tskhomi Saeristavo and take possession of the entire territory of Odishi up to Anakopia, while Sharvashidze established himself in Abkhazia...*”.² This is especially interesting because it confirms beyond doubt that the entire territory of the Tskhumi *Saeristavo* up to Anakopia (now called New Athos) belonged to Odishi-Samegrelo.

The West Georgian *eristavis* obviously wanted to tighten their grip on the *eristav* possessions,³ the Likht-Imereti kings being an obvious obstacle. This explains the relative enthusiasm with which the West Georgian *eristavs* hailed Giorgi V the Brilliant (1314-1346) in Kutaisi where he removed Bagrat, grandson of

¹ **Chronograph.** – *Kartlis Tskhovreba*. Georgian text based on the main manuscripts prepared by **S. Kaukhchishvili**. Vol. II. Tbilisi, 1959, p. 229; *The Hundred Years' Chronicle*. Translated and with commentary: **Dmitri Gamq'relidze**. – *Kartlis Tskhovreba /A History of Georgia/*. Editor in Chief of the Georgian and Russian editions: Academician **Roin Metreveli**; Editor in Chief of the English edition: **Professor Stephen Jones**. *Artanuji Publishing*. Tbilisi 2014, p. 347 (emphasis added – **Z.P.**) (<http://science.org.ge/old/books/Kartlis%20cxovreba/Kartlis%20Cxovreba%202012%20Eng.pdf>).

² **Prince Vakhushti**. Description of Georgian Kingdom, p. 801.

³ **Z. Anchabadze**. From the History of Medieval Abkhazia, p. 295.

David Narin, from power. The enthusiasm of the *eristavis* of Odishi, Guria, Svanetia, and Abkhazia was probably not quite sincere – they were merely too weak to stand opposed to the Georgian king and had to meet him “with great gifts and welcome his rule in Imereti and the whole of Georgia”.¹ In this way, they probably preserved their status as hereditary rulers.² This allowed Giorgi V to proceed further without any problems to finally gain control over the whole of Western Georgia. Prince Vakhushti wrote that the king “entered Odishi and moved from it to Abkhazia, where he dealt with the local problems and established his control over the fortresses”.³ The fact that for some reason Giorgi V reserved the Abkhazian fortresses for himself deserves mention; he returned the Tskhumi *Saeristavo* to the *Eristavi* of Odishi (“Bedieli”).⁴

Throughout the 14th century, the West Georgian *eristavis*, including Sharvashidzes, the *eristavis* of Abkhazia, remained loyal to the central authorities, that is, to the Tbilisi throne, thus contributing to the continued unity of the common Georgian state. At the same time, the Dadianis, rulers of Odishi (Samegrelo) supported by the central authorities, were gradually gaining strength to spite the Imereti Bagrationis and became the actual leaders of Western Georgia. Throughout the 14th century they owned the Tskhumi *Saeristavo* and extended their influence to the *eristavs* of Abkhazia – Sharvashidze. According to Arabic (al-Muhibbi and al-Kalkashandi)⁵

¹ **Prince Vakhushti**. Description of Georgian Kingdom, p. 258.

² **Z. Anchabadze**. From the History of Medieval Abkhazia, p. 236.

³ **Prince Vakhushti**. Description of Georgian Kingdom, p. 258.

⁴ **Prince Vakhushti**. Description of Georgian Kingdom, p. 258.

⁵ *Arabian Historians of the 14th-15th Century about Georgia*, Translation from the Arabic, foreword, notes and indices by **D. Gocholeishvili**. Tbilisi, 1988, p. 53 /in Georgian/; **V. Tizengauzen**. A Note of El-Kalkashandi about the Georgians. Translation into Russian and publication of **V. Tizenagauzen**. – In: *Notes of the Eastern Branch of the Russian Archaeological Society*, vol. 1, issue 3. St. Petersburg, 1886, p. 214.

and West European (Giosafat Barbaro)¹ sources, in the 14th-15th centuries, Samegrelo was “stretched to Circassia,” which means that Abkhazia as far as Circassia was within Odishi,² while “*Dadiani (Dadiani) ruled Sokhumi and Abkhaz.*” Tskhumi-Sokhumi was the capital of the Odishi-Megrelian rulers. It was in this city that Vamek I (1384-1396), the most influential of the Dadianis, minted his coins.³

Early in the 15th century, Georgian King Giorgi VII (1393-1407) confirmed the rights of Mamia, who ruled after Vamek I Dadiani, to the Tskhumi possessions. According to foreign authors, in the mid-15th century Dadiani, the rulers of Odishi were recognized as the “*kings of Samegrelo and Abkhazia*”.⁴ The fall of Constantinople in 1453 and the much more noticeable presence of the Ottoman Turks in the northern and eastern Black Sea areas largely changed the geopolitical configuration in the region and worsened the situation in contemporary Abkhazian territory. In 1454, the Turks landed the first of their armed groups in Sukhumi and plundered the city and the Abkhazian coast.⁵ Georgian King

¹ *Information about Georgia Supplied by the Italian Travelers of the 15th century*. Translation from the Italian, foreword, notes and indices by **E. Mamistvalishvili**. Tbilisi, 1981, p. 55 /in Georgian/.

² **E. Mamistvalishvili**. From the history Odishi. – In: *Proceedings of Tbilisi State University*, Vol. 310, Tbilisi, 1992, p. 50 /in Georgian/.

³ **D. Kapanadze**. Georgian numismatics. Moscow, 1955, p. 97 /in Russian/; **Z. Anchabadze**. From the History of Medieval Abkhazia, p. 238; *On Distortions of the Georgian-Abkhazian Relationships*. An Answer to the Authors of the “Abkhazian Letter”. Tbilisi, 1991, pp. 12, 76 /in Georgian and in Russian/.

⁴ **M. Tamarashvili**. History of Catholicism among the Georgians. Tiflis, 1902, p. 596 /in Georgian/; **Z. Anchabadze**. From the History of Medieval Abkhazia, p. 239.

⁵ **Z. Anchabadze**. From the History of Medieval Abkhazia, p. 252; **E. Mamistvalishvili**. From the history Odishi, p. 54; **M. Svanidze**. From the Chronology of Vakhushti Bagrationi (The First Invasion of the Turks

Giorgi VIII (1446-1466) immediately entered Abkhazia and “returned the local people to their homes, restored the fortifications and, after coping with the task, went back to Geguti”¹ (one of the royal residences close to contemporary Kutaisi).

In the 1460s, the Abkhazian *Saeristavo* remained part of Georgian politics. Prince Sharvashidze supported Bagrat Bagrationi who “proclaimed himself king of Likht-Imeretia” (Western Georgia) and received “power over the Abkhazs and Djiks [Sadzes – Z.P.]”² from the Kutaisi king. In the latter half of the 15th century, the Abkhazian *Saeristavo* recognized the ruler of Odishi-Samegrelo as its suzerain. “Upper Abkhazia” was part of the Odishi Principality, while “the Sharvashidzes ruled Abkhazia up to Djiketi [Sadzen – Z.P.]” and “did not always obey Dadiani”.³

on the Black Sea Coast of Georgia). – In: *Source Study Researches*. Tbilisi, 1985, p. 110 /in Russian/.

¹ **Prince Vakhushti**. Description of Georgian Kingdom, p. 284.

² **Prince Vakhushti**. Description of Georgian Kingdom, p. 806. It is probably not accidental that the quote taken from the work by Prince Vakhushti says that unlike the other Western-Georgian rulers (Dadiani, Gurieli and Gelovani) who ruled specific regions (Odishi, Guria, and Svaneti), the Sharvashidzes received power over the Abkhazs and Djiks rather than power over Abkhazia as a region. This looks like another confirmation that the territory of contemporary Abkhazia was not united administratively at that time and that the Sharvashidzes were at best the owners of part of the Abkhazian *Saeristavo*. In any case, one thing is clear: Vakhushti, who lived in the 18th century when the Sharvashidze princes were considered the rulers of Abkhazia (within its contemporary borders), had no reason to apply the realities of his time to the 15th century and call the members of the princely family of Sharvashidze the rulers of Abkhazia (for more detail, see: **Z. Papaskiri**. Vakhushti Bagrationi, the Giant of Medieval Georgian Historiography. – *Historical Researches*. Annual. Abkhazian Organization of Ekvtime Takaishvili Georgian Historical Society. Vol. I. Tbilisi, 1998, pp. 249-250 /in Georgian/.

³ *Kartlis Tskhovreba*, Vol. II, p. 349, pp. 112-113.

Ethno-Political and Socio-cultural Makeup of Abkhazia in the 16th Century and up to 1864

In the 16th century, the territory of contemporary Abkhazia witnessed dramatic changes: it gradually turned from a highly developed feudal region with Christian culture and literacy into a backward country with a primitive patriarchal economy and revived pagan beliefs. The changes that took place during the 16th and 17th centuries were brought about by the onslaught of North Caucasian ethnically close Djiko-Abkhaz tribes that first invaded the Abkhazian *Saeristavo* and later spread across the rest of contemporary Abkhazia's territory. Historians, including Abkhaz historians, never doubted that the Adighe legends about "conquering Abkhazia" in the first quarter of the 15th century by Adighe leader Inal and Abazin princes Ashe and Shahe,¹ his two allies, tell the real story² of "how one after another tribes and people came to Abkhazia from somewhere in the North, from beyond the mountains".³

Mountain dwellers trickled down to the valleys at all times; it was probably a never-ending process. However, the strong Georgian feudal state and society and their equally strong legal order coped with the onslaught of primitive tribes. The newcomers gradually adjusted to the state's social and economic system to become an inalienable part of Georgian feudal society. Everything changed when state power proved unable to ensure law and order across the entire territory. The slackened grip allowed the vast mountain regions in particular to revive their primitive past. The first indications of this appeared in the 13th century when initial signs of the "Osset threat" appeared in Eastern Georgia. In the first

¹ **Sh. Nogmov.** History of the Adyghe people. According to Kabardian's legends. Nalchik, 1982, pp. 76-78 /in Russian/.

² **D. Muskhelishvili.** The Historic Status of Abkhazia, p. 133.

³ **Sh. Inal-ipa.** Pages of Historical Ethnography of the Abkhazs. Sukhumi, 1971, p. 141 /in Russian/.

quarter of the 14th century, Giorgi V Brilliant blocked the drive of the Ossets and restored law and order in Shida Kartli.

Western Georgia felt pressure from the mountains in the late 14th century where the Djiko-Abkhaz tribes presented the greatest threat to the Abkhazian *Saeristavo*. **The House of Sharvashidze, which, for many centuries, had been associated with Georgian law and order in the region, not merely remained passive in the face of the tribal onslaught. It served as the main instrument for further infiltration of these mountain tribes in the southeastern direction to defeat the Odishi rulers.** Throughout the 16th century, however, a large part of what today is Abkhazia “as far as Sokhumi” remained the “land of the Dadianis”.¹ Early in the 17th century members of the House of Sharvashidze, aware of the weakened Odishi-Samegrelo rulers, moved against the Dadiani House. It is commonly believed that this was when an Abkhazian principality independent from Odishi-Samegrelo appeared.² The Odishi Prince still owned his residence in Merkula (contemporary Ochamchire District) where Levan II Dadiani signed a peace treaty with the Ottoman Empire in 1615.³

¹ *Turkish Sources on the History of Samtskhe-Saatabago of the First Half of the 16th Century*. Turkish documents with Georgian translations, research findings and commentaries published by **Ts. Abuladze**. Tbilisi, 1983, p. 57; **B. Khorava**. The Relations between Odishi and Abkhazia in the 15th-18th Centuries. Tbilisi, 1996, p. 60 /in Georgian/.

² **Ir. Antelava**. Essays on the history of Abkhazia XVII-XVIII centuries. Sukhumi, 1951, p. 25 /in Russian/; **Z. Anchabadze**. From the History of Medieval Abkhazia, pp. 262, 289. Other opinions were recently offered (**A. Tugushi**. About the History of the Abkhazian Princedom. – *Sakartvelo (Georgia – Newspaper)*, 12-18 June, 1993, p. 6, in Georgian; **D. Muskhelishvili**. The Historic Status of Abkhazia in Georgia's Statehood; **N. Jikia**. On the Question of the Emergence of the Abkhazian Princedom. – *Historical Researches*, Annual of Abkhazian Organization of Ekvtime Takaishvili Georgian Historical Society, IV. Tbilisi, 2001, pp. 120-141 /in Georgian/.

³ **B. Khorava**. The Relations between Odishi and Abkhazia, p. 72.

In the 1630s Levan II Dadiani (1611-1637) moved into Abkhazia; his troops reached the River Kapoetistskali (the Bzyb) and remained for some time in control of the Sharvashidze House.¹ Later, the Abkhazs resumed their devastating inroads into the Odishi domains, thus forcing Levan II Dadiani to build fortifications along the Kelasuri, the so-called “Kelasuri Wall”, “*sixty thousand steps long.*” According to Italian missionary Archangelo Lamberti who lived for a long time in Samegrelo, the wall was built in the middle of the 17th century to put a halt to the Abkhaz inroads.²

In the latter half of the 17th century, the Abkhazs penetrated beyond the “Kelasuri Wall” and pushed their border with Odishi to the Kodori River; later they conquered the territory between the Kodori and Inguri rivers. **By the early 18th century the Abkhazs acquired the territory of contemporary Abkhazia completely.** From the very beginning, they had no strong central power; early in the 18th century it fell apart into three essentially independent parts: the northern part between the Bzyb and Kodori rivers under Rostom, the elder son of Zegnak Sharvashidze; the land between the Kodori and Galidzga (Abjua, the Abkhaz for the midland) was transferred to Djikeshia, the second son, while Kvapu, the younger son, inherited the Galidzga-Inguri interfluve, which upon his death was ruled by his son Murzakan³ (hence the name of the region, Samurzakano).

Despite the general cultural decline caused by the revived primitive order, Abkhazia still remained part of the area of the Georgian written culture and literacy. Judging by deeds, oath

¹ **B. Khorava.** The Relations between Odishi and Abkhazia, p. 77.

² **Arcangelo Lamberti.** A Description of Samegrelo. *A. Chkonias* translation from Italian. 2nd edition. The preface, editing and commentary by **L. Asatiani.** Tbilisi, 1938, p. 192 /in Georgian/.

³ **Ir. Antelava.** The political life of Abkhazia in the XVI-XVIII centuries. – *Essays on the history of the Abkhazian ASSR.* Vol. I. Sukhumi, 1960, p. 122 /in Russian/.

books, and other documents of the Abkhazian princes' chancelleries Georgian remained the official language. As late as the latter half of the 18th century when the Ottoman Empire put more pressure on Abkhazia and forced the princes of the Sharvashidze House to convert to Islam Abkhazia still partly remained within the Georgian state, political, cultural, and linguistic universe.

This means that the Djiko-Abkhaz extension to the south-east organized by the Abkhazian House of Sharvashidze and the fact that it managed to remain on the territories that earlier belonged to Odishi-Megrelian rulers can be described, despite certain specifics, as strife typical of feudalism. When moving into the Odishi territory the Sharvashidze House had no intention of setting up an Apsua-Abkhaz state totally independent of the Georgian state and political system. The Abkhazian rulers merely tried, very much as Dadiani of Samegrelo and Gurieli of Guria, to move higher in the Georgian state and political structure.

By the early 19th century the geopolitical situation in the Caucasus changed: in the latter half of the 18th century the Russian Empire actively built up its presence along its southern borders to push Turkey out of the Northern and Eastern Black Sea area. The Georgian states (Kartli-Kakheti and Imereti) were openly supporting and encouraging Russian military-political activity. Members of the Sharvashidze House, its Samurzakano branch, in particular, marched together with the Georgian leaders and supported their anti-Turkish sentiments. In 1771 Samurzakano Prince Levan Sharvashidze took part in the siege of the Poti fortress (together with the Odishi detachment) carried out by the Russian expeditionary corps under General A. Sukhotin during the Russo-Turkish War of 1768-1774.¹ Prince of Abkhazia Zurab

¹ **G. Dzidzaria.** Accession of Abkhazia to Russia. – *Essays on the history of the Abkhazian ASSR*, vol. I. Sukhumi, 1960, p. 130 /in Russian/.

Sharvashidze joined the anti-Ottoman drive: supported by Levan Sharvashidze he rebelled against the Turks and drove them out of the Sokhumi fortress.¹

In 1801 the Russian Empire liquidated the Kartli-Kakheti Kingdom to establish its direct rule in Eastern Georgia and move into Western Georgia. On 2 December, 1803 Grigol Dadiani signed a treaty with Russia in the village of Chaladidi. He recognized the Russian emperor as his sovereign. On 9 July, 1805 Levan V Dadiani took the throne of Odishi-Samegrelo in the village of Bandza. The ceremony, which brought together all the members of the Odishi aristocracy, was also attended by Levan and Manuchar of the Sharvashidze House who, having officially confirmed that Samurzakano “*belonged to the Autocrat of Samegrelo Dadiani*”, took an oath of allegiance to the Russian emperor.² It meant that Samurzakano, as an inalienable part of the Samegrelo Principality, became part of the Russian Empire.

Soon after another Russo-Turkish war (1806-1812), the Russian diplomacy began concentrating on Abkhazia. Under a corresponding diplomatic procedure, the centerpiece of which was an official request from Safar-bey (Giorgi) Sharvashidze drawn up in St. Petersburg in Georgian, Abkhazia was joined to Russia.³ It should be said that at that point not only the Georgian and Abkhaz leaders (Nino Bagrationi-Dadiani⁴ in particular) but also the top

¹ **G. Dzidzaria.** Accession of Abkhazia to Russia. – In: **G. Dzidzaria.** Works. Vol. I. Sukhumi, 1988, pp. 16-17 /in Russian/.

² *Acts, collected by the Caucasian Archaeographic Commission* (further: *ACAC*). Ed. **A. Berge.** Vol. II. Tiflis, 1868, p. 527 /in Russian/.

³ For the text of the document, see: **Z. Papaskiri.** Essays on the History of Contemporary Abkhazia. Part I. *From Antiquity to 1917*. Tbilisi, 2004, pp. 126-127, available at [http://dspace.nplg.gov.ge/bitstream/1234/29913/1/Narkvevebi_I.pdf] /in Georgian/.

⁴ Ruler of Samegrelo Nino Bagrationi-Dadiani wrote to Emperor Alexander I in this connection: “*Today is the right time to take [Abkhazia]*

Russians stationed in the Caucasus looked at Abkhazia **as part of a common Georgian political and state structure. It served as the main argument in favor of joining Abkhazia to the Russian Empire along with the other Georgian territories.**¹ Giorgi Sharvashidze, who sent his request to the Russian emperor, was very open about his country being part of the common Georgian cultural and political universe. **By writing the document in the Georgian language the Abkhazian ruler clearly indicated to Russia and the world community as a whole that in international relations the Abkhazian principality was representing the Georgian national-state, cultural, and political world.**

Members of the Sharvashidze House (not merely those who belonged to Samurzakano) remained within the common Georgian socio-political system and Georgian linguistic culture and literacy. The pledge Kelesh-bey Sharvashidze gave to his nephew Sosran-bek Sharvashidze on 20 May, 1806² confirms the above. It was written in Georgian according to the contemporary Georgian legal norms. It should be said that the document was not drawn up in Samurzakano, a region that had stronger ties than the others with the rest of Georgia, but at the court of the Abkhazian ruler, commonly believed to be a true Muslim. More than that, Abkhazia was part of the feudal system of serfdom that existed in all other

under Your wing since it (the House of Abkhazian rulers. – Z.P.) belongs to our House and is our neighbour; earlier we acted as its patron” (ACAC, vol. III. Tiflis, 1869, p. 201 [emphasis added – Z.P.]).

¹ Here is what P. Tsitsianov wrote on this occasion: “*Kelesh-bek was known as Sharvashidze; his domains were one of the Iberian provinces*”. ACAC, vol. II, p. 463). Another commander-in-chief of the Caucasus, General Gudovich, wrote: “*Since ancient times the princes of Abkhazia belonged to the Sharvashidze family; their ancestors were Christians yet Sefer Ali bek’s grandfather, after moving away from Imeretia and becoming a subject of the Ottoman Porte, embraced the Muslim faith*” (ACAC, vol. III, pp. 208-209, emphasis added – Z.P.).

² ACAC, vol. III, p. 190.

parts of Georgia. This means that despite the changes that had taken place in Abkhazia in the Later Middle Ages under pressure from the mountain tribes, their primitive tribal order notwithstanding, it remained part of the Georgian feudal state.

Under the last ruler of Abkhazia, Mikhail Sharvashidze, the Abkhazs also regarded themselves as part of the common Georgian political, state, and cultural expanse, which is best illustrated by the fact that **Georgian remained the state language of Abkhazia.**¹ **The Chancellery of the Abkhazian ruler used it in its official documents.** The fact that many of the top Abkhaz nobles had Georgian names is evidence that ties with the common Georgian social and cultural world were very much alive. In fact, even Sadz-Ubykhs sometimes used Georgian names. Two prominent political figures of the early half of the 19th century can serve as an example: the surname of **Levan Tsanubaia** (the Georgian-Megrelian form of the Tsanba family name) and the Georgian name Zurab of the prince of the Ubykhs **Zurab** Khamish. Not infrequently, documents in Russian use the Georgian term “aznaurs” for the Abkhaz nobles rather than the Abkhaz term “aamsta.” Finally, and **most importantly, the Abkhazian ruling house regarded itself as an inalienable part of the common Georgian Christian world: the last Abkhazian ruler and his son Giorgi Sharvashidze were buried in the Mokvi Cathedral; the inscriptions on their tombstones are in the ancient Georgian writing, Asomtavruli.**²

¹ According to one of the top Caucasian administrators, *“the princely family of Sharvashidze used the Georgian written language”*. See: **Sh. Chkhetia**. To the History of the Abkhazian Principality. 1853-1855. – *Historical Herald*, №15-16, Tbilisi, 1963, p. 154 /in Russian/ [emphasis added – Z.P.].

² The so-called memorandum of the deputies of Abkhazia and Samurzakano nobility of 23 March 1870 is quite interesting. It was submitted to Adjutant General Prince Sviatopolk-Mirskiy, Chairman of the Tiflis Committee for Estate and Land Questions (for the text see: **A.**

Abkhazia – the Sukhumi Department (District) in 1864-1917

When the rule of princes in Abkhazia was abolished the territory of contemporary Abkhazia was transformed into the Sukhumi military department with three districts (Bzyb, Sukhumi, and Abjua) and two police districts (*pristavstvo*) of Tsebelda and Samurzakano under the Kutaisi Governor-General.¹ The Russian administration immediately set about establishing “state rule and order” on the new lands (of which Abkhazia was part), which meant their continuous colonization. Enraged by the new state order the Abkhazs rebelled in 1866.

Ignited by the local peasants’ refusal to obey the peasant reform, the revolt, according to a very apt comment by prominent Abkhaz scholar S. Lakoba, was of an “*anti-colonial, national-liberation nature*”.² The rebels declared Giorgi Sharvashidze their ruler and demanded that he lead them in their struggle. The government, which urgently dispatched considerable military forces under the Kutaisi Governor-General, suppressed the uprising and punished the leaders and instigators. Some of the active fighters were publicly executed in Sukhumi; many were exiled to Siberia and other parts of Russia. Giorgi Sharvashidze was exiled to the Orenburg Military District for military service. This was not all: the empire encouraged emigration to Turkey, which produced about 20 thousand muhajirs.

Menteshashvili. Historical preconditions of modern separatism in Georgia. Tbilisi, 1998, pp. 28-30 /in Russian/; **Z. Papaskiri.** Essays on the History of Contemporary Abkhazia. Part I, pp. 187-189).

¹ **G. Dzidzaria.** Abkhazia during the Crimean War. Abolition The Abkhazian Principality. – *Essays on the history of the Abkhazian ASSR.* Vol. I. Sukhumi, 1960, pp. 199-200 /in Russian/.

² **S. Lakoba.** Essays on the Political History of Abkhazia. Sukhumi, 1990, p. 26 /in Russian/.

This did not calm the region down: in the spring of 1877, when another war with Russia had already begun, the Turkish government tried to capitalize on the wave of anti-Russian sentiments to open a second front in Abkhazia. The revolt, the largest one in Abkhazia, caused much more severe retribution than in 1866. Nearly all of those who lived in the Gudauta and Kodori regions were declared guilty. It was deemed expedient to *“resettle them in Turkey” to get rid of the guilty and to “prevent any other threats from the Sukhumi Department”*.¹

Having freed a large chunk of what today is Abkhazia, the Russian Empire set about colonizing the area on a large scale and *“bringing Russian statehood there.”* It was considered advisable to bring *“a purely Russian population”*² to Abkhazia as a way of carrying out this highly important task. At the same time, the colonial authorities went out of their way to *“bring closer the autochthonous population of Abkhazia and Samurzakano and Russians and plant the fundamentals of Russian civil awareness among them”*.³ Simultaneously, much was done to protect the Abkhazs *“in the most reliable manner against ... the Georgian influence to ensure, some time in the future, their merging with the Russians”*.⁴

This was what the government was doing in the 1860s-1890s: it spared no effort to wrench Abkhazia from the common Georgian cultural and historical entity and push the Georgian language and literature aside. This is best illustrated by the fact that

¹ **G. Dzidzaria.** Muhajirs and the Problems of History of Abkhazia in the 19th century. Sukhumi, 1982, p. 282 /in Russian/.

² *The Report of the Kutaisi Military Governor on the People's Military Management*, September 2, 1900. – In book: **A. Silagadze, V. Guruli.** Historical and Political Essays. Tbilisi, 2002, p. 309/in Russian/.

³ *Kutaisi Military Governor for Military and Popular Management*. №54, 3 august 1900. – In: **A. Silagadze, V. Guruli.** Historical Political Essays, p. 300 /in Russian/.

⁴ *The Report of the Kutaisi Military Governor*, p. 313.

the Abkhazs were given their own written language. It was a historic event for the Abkhazs hailed by Georgian intellectuals.¹ They did even more than merely hail it – D. Purtseladze, I. Gegia, G. Kurt-sikidze, and K. Machavariani were actively involved in the process.

They helped the Abkhazs to acquire their own written language with the best of intentions, which had nothing to do with what the so-called Russian patrons who allegedly looked after the interests of the “smaller peoples” had in mind. P. Uslar, who created the Abkhaz alphabet, had the following to say about the true intentions of Russian “language policy:” the Georgian alphabet is “essentially the best alphabet in the world,” which could be taken as “*the starting point of a common alphabet for all Caucasian languages that had no written word;*” yet, “*If we borrow not only the*

¹ Iakob Gogebashvili was one of those who were especially clear about this. Some Abkhazian academics accuse him, without reason, of ideological preparation of the notorious “Hundred Years’ War of Georgia against Abkhazia” (**S. Lakoba**, one of the ideologists of the Abkhaz separatism, demonstrated special zeal: see: **S. Lakoba**, *The Hundred Years’ War of Georgia against Abkhazia*. Gagry, 1993 /in Russian/). According to Iakob Gogebashvili, “*Certain newspaper correspondents are hostile to the idea of translating the theological books into the Abkhaz and of serving in this language. This is puzzling. Even though for many years Abkhazia has remained part of the Georgian political body where church services were conducted in Georgian and where Georgian was the written language, the Abkhaz is undoubtedly not a vernacular of the Georgian but a language, albeit kindred, in its own right. It is undoubtedly entitled to be the language of the church, have its own written form and its folk literature*” (quoted from: **O. Churgulia**, *Mahajirisus and Georgian Intellectuals* (2nd half of the 19th Century). – *Investigations in the History of Abkhazia/Georgia*. Tbilisi, 1999, Metzniereba Publishers, Tbilisi, 1999, pp. 401-402 /in Russian/). Bishop Cyrion (today tagged as an enemy of the Abkhazs) was one of those who hailed the idea of the Abkhaz written language. He intended “to contribute to the national textbook of the Abkhaz language” and called on the Sukhumi Georgians “to help the Abkhaz in all ways in this cultural initiative” (**O. Churgulia**, *Mahajirisus and Georgian*, p. 401).

system of the alphabet but also the outline of the letters from the Georgians, we shall unwittingly create problems when the Russian written language spreads across the Caucasus. **The autochthonous languages should make it easier to learn Russian**".¹

Evgeny Veidenbaum, another prominent Russian figure, was even more outspoken: **"The Abkhaz language with no written language and no literature is doomed. It will disappear sooner or later. The question is: What language will replace it? Russian rather than Georgian should become the vehicle of cultural ideas and conceptions. This means that the Abkhaz written language cannot be an aim in itself: it should undermine, through the Church and schools, the need for the Georgian language. It should be gradually replaced with the state language. Failure to do this might create an Abkhaz autonomy on top of the Georgian and other autonomies"**.²

Similar aims were pursued in the religious sphere. On 3 September 1898, the Holy Synod ruled that *"the services and the other Christian rites in the parishes populated by the Abkhazs should be conducted in Slavonic"*.³ Aware of the great role of the Georgian clergy, who remained in control of *"such strong institutions as the Church and the schools"*, the Russian authorities regarded them as the main obstacle to Russification. This was an "evil" to "be uprooted once and for all".⁴ The "only way to do this" was to *"remove the Georgian clergy from the schools and the local churches"* and to appoint *"Russian and, if possible, Abkhaz priests to the parishes of the Sukhumi eparchy predominantly populated by the Abkhazs"*.⁵

¹ **G. Zhorzholiani.** Historical and Political Roots of the Conflict in Abkhazia/Georgia. Tbilisi, 2000, p. 35 /in Russian/, emphasis added – **Z.P.**

² **Z. Anchabadze.** Essay on the ethnic history of the Abkhaz people. Sukhumi, 1976, p. 96 /in Russian/.

³ *The Report of the Kutaisi Military Governor*, p. 312.

⁴ *The Report of the Kutaisi Military Governor*, p. 312.

⁵ *The Report of the Kutaisi Military Governor*, p. 312-313.

The Russian authorities were still dissatisfied – they wanted to remove Abkhazia from the common Georgian Christian entity once and for all. Prince Golitsyn, Vicegerent of the Caucasus, and Alexei, Exarch of Georgia, wrote to the Chief Procurator of the Synod: *“It is desirable to tear the Sukhumi Eparchy away from the extremely undesirable Georgian influence. It would be very good to join the Sukhumi Eparchy to Kuban for this purpose. In the Kuban Region, there is a purely Russian population of 1,716,245. The one-hundred-thousand-strong population of the Black Sea coast, which speaks many languages, will easily dissolve in this mass”*.¹

Moreover, the imperial governing circles also intended to separate Abkhazia administratively from the other parts of Georgia. In 1904, on the suggestion of Prince of Oldenburg, the imperial authorities intended to make Gagra and its environs part of the Black Sea Gubernia by separating them from the rest of Georgia. The attempt was cut short by the Abkhaz nobility who were dead set against those who wanted to disrupt the historical and cultural unity of the Georgians and the Abkhazs. The Abkhaz delegation, which arrived in Tiflis on 26 April 1916, to meet the Caucasian viceroy was the best confirmation of the prevailing sentiments.²

Nevertheless, the constant political and ideological pressure on the Abkhazs barely camouflaged by hypocritical statements about the concern over the local people’s cultural and national awareness bore fruit. “The awakening of the Abkhazs” was obviously anti-Georgian; the so-called “new Abkhazs” came to the forefront to capture the political initiative after the February 1917 revolution in Russia.

¹ **Z. Papaskiri**. *Essays on the History of Contemporary Abkhazia*, I, p. 229.

² *The Abkhazian delegation handed in a petition to the Caucasian viceroy*. For the text see: **J. Gamakharria**, **B. Gogia**. *Abkhazia – the Historical Region of Georgia*. Tbilisi, 1996, pp. 385-386 /in Russian/.

Abkhazia as Part of the Georgian Democratic Republic

Starting in February 1918 when the Russian Empire was crumbling the new Abkhaz leaders who usurped power moved ahead to rupture all ties with the rest of Georgia. In October 1917 the Abkhaz delegation headed by Al. Sharvashidze signed, together with others, the so-called Allied Agreement of the South-eastern Union of Cossack Detachments, Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus, and Free Peoples of the Steppe. It was not Abkhazia as a whole but the “*mountain people of the Sukhumi District (the **Abkhazs**) who were the subjects of the Southeastern Union*”.¹ On 8 November, 1917 the nationalist forces, in disregard of the sentiments of the autochthonous Georgians and other population groups living in Abkhazia, convened a congress of the Abkhaz people in Sukhumi that set up the Abkhaz People’s Soviet and adopted the Declaration of the Congress of the Abkhaz People and the Constitution of the Abkhaz People’s Soviet. The Congress officially confirmed that the Abkhaz people (not Abkhazia) had joined “*the Alliance of the United Mountain Peoples*”.

The decisions of the so-called 1st Congress of the Abkhaz People stirred up Abkhazia and Samurzakano in particular, which wanted to reunite Abkhazia and Georgia. Abkhazia was facing a split; the danger became even more obvious when tension rose in the Northern Caucasus in January 1918. Deprived of support of the Southeastern Union and the Alliance of the United Mountain Peoples, the Abkhaz People’s Soviet had to seek understanding

¹ **J. Gamakharia, B. Gogia.** Abkhazia – the Historical Region of Georgia, p. 389; *The Status of the Autonomous Regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia in Georgia (1917-1988)*. Collection of Political-Legal Acts in Georgian and Russian. Compiled and edited by **T. Diasamidze**. Tbilisi, 2004, p. 212, available at [http://www.rrc.ge/admn/books.php?lng_3=ge] /in Russian/ [Emphasis added – **Z.P.**].

with Tbilisi. On 9 February, 1918 the delegation of the Abkhaz People's Soviet and members of the National Council of Georgia met in the Georgian capital. The Abkhaz delegation had to agree that *"it was necessary for Abkhazia to join Georgia with the rights of an autonomy."* Tbilisi, in turn, agreed to *"help restore Abkhazia's historical borders between the Mzymta and the Inguri rivers"*.¹

The agreement of 9 February, 1918 was not an interstate document of sorts: at that time, neither Georgia nor Abkhazia were sovereign states, while the two sides – the National Council of Georgia and the Abkhaz People's Soviet – were not state structures. The document's historic importance, however, cannot be contested: it relieved tension between Tbilisi and Sukhumi and made their relations more constructive.

When the Transcaucasian Federative Republic fell apart on 26 May, 1918 and the Georgian Democratic Republic was formed, the Abkhaz People's Soviet elected by the Abkhaz population (and therefore not representing the autochthonous Georgian or any other population) *"ruled ... to assume full power within Abkhazia"*,² which meant separation from the rest of Georgia. Not quite sure of its position the Abkhaz People's Soviet had to ask the National Council of Georgia (the de facto ruling structure in Georgia) for *"friendly support in organizing state power in Abkhazia"*; it also asked Tbilisi *"to leave a detachment of the Georgian Red Guard at the Soviet's disposal"*.³ The same document entrusted R. Kakubava, V. Gurjua, G. Ajamov, and G. Tumanov with the rights to negotiate with the Georgian political leaders.

The talks were successfully completed in Tbilisi with a Treaty between the Government of the Georgian Democratic Republic and the Abkhaz People's Soviet signed on 11 June, under

¹ A. Menteshashvili. Historical Preconditions, pp. 16-17.

² J. Gamakharia, B. Gogia. Abkhazia – the Historical Region, p. 413.

³ J. Gamakharia, B. Gogia. Abkhazia – the Historical Region, p. 413.

which the post of minister for Abkhazia was set up under the government of the Georgian Democratic Republic filled on “*the recommendation of the Abkhaz People’s Soviet*”. The Soviet, in turn, was entrusted with “domestic administration and self-administration in Abkhazia”; the Georgian Democratic Republic pledged to fund the administration of Abkhazia and, most important, “in order to promptly establish revolutionary law and order and organize strong power, the government of the Georgian Democratic Republic” pledged to dispatch “a detachment of the Red Guard to support the Abkhaz People’s Soviet” to Abkhazia.¹ This means that according to Minister for Abkhazia R. Chkhotua, under the treaty of 11 June “*the Abkhaz people tied their future to the fates of the Georgian people according to autonomous principles*”.²

On 13 February, 1919 Abkhazia held the first universal democratic elections to the People’s Soviet – the highest state power structure in Abkhazia. The ruling Social-Democratic Party of Georgia won with 27 seats out of 40. Out of 27, 11 deputies, were Abkhazs and 11 were Georgians, while 5 deputies represented other nationalities. On the whole, out of 40 deputies 18 were Abkhazs; 16 were Georgians, while 6 represented other nationalities.³ Simultaneously, Abkhazia elected deputies to the Constituent Assembly of Georgia. V. Sharvashidze, D. Emukhvari, V. Gurdzhua, D. Zakharov, and I. Pashalidi were elected according to the party list of the Social-Democratic Party of Georgia (out of the five deputies elected to represent Abkhazia in the supreme power

¹ **A. Menteshashvili.** Historical Preconditions, p. 22.

² **J. Gamakharia, B. Gogia.** Abkhazia – the Historical Region, p. 753, emphasis added – **Z.P.**

³ For more detail, see: **Z. Papaskiri.** Essays on the History of Contemporary Abkhazia, Part II, 1917-1993. Tbilisi, 2007, pp. 32-34 [http://dspace.nplg.gov.ge/bitstream/1234/29915/1/Nakveti_II.pdf] /in Georgian/.

structure of Georgia, three were Abkhazs, one was Russian and one Greek; there were no Georgians among them).¹

On 20 March, 1919 the newly elected People's Soviet of Abkhazia adopted the Act of Abkhazian Autonomy, Point 1 of which said: "***Abkhazia is part of the Democratic Republic of Georgia as its autonomy***".² Point 2 envisaged electing a joint commission "with equal representation of the Constituent Assembly of Georgia and the People's Soviet of Abkhazia to draw ***the Constitution of Autonomous Abkhazia and determine the relations between the Central and Autonomous powers***".³

Sokhumi had three drafts of the Constitution of Autonomous Abkhazia: the draft submitted by the Social-Democratic faction of the People's Soviet of Abkhazia; the draft of the Commissariat (government) of Abkhazia; and the draft submitted by the Soviet's separatist-minded deputies, ***all of them clearly described Abkhazia as an autonomy within the Georgian Democratic Republic***.⁴ In the fall of 1919, the final version was ready; it was approved by the People's Soviet of Abkhazia on 16 October, 1919 and submitted to Georgia's Constituent Assembly where its smaller constitutional commission adopted an interim document, Provisions on the Administration of Autonomous Abkhazia, to be later included into the Constitution of Georgia approved by its Constituent Assembly on 21 February, 1921.

Article 1 of the document read: "***Abkhazia*** between the rivers Mekhadyr and Inguri and between the Black Sea coast and the

¹ **Z. Papaskiri**. Essays on the History of Contemporary Abkhazia, II, p. 35.

² **J. Gamakharia, B. Gogia**. Abkhazia – the Historical Region of Georgia, p. 435 [Emphasis added – **Z.P.**].

³ **J. Gamakharia, B. Gogia**. Abkhazia – the Historical Region of Georgia, p. 435 [Emphasis added – **Z.P.**].

⁴ For more detail, see: **A. Menteshashvili**. Historical preconditions of modern separatism in Georgia, pp. 80-94 [Emphasis added – **Z.P.**].

Caucasian Range is *an inalienable part of the Republic of Georgia* and within these boundaries *is administering its domestic affairs autonomously*".¹ In this way the state and legal relations between Sokhumi and Tbilisi were finally regulated; and Abkhazia became an autonomy within a single Georgian state, something that the Abkhaz political elite had wanted and toward which it had been consistently moving. This meant that those who deny this irrefutable historical fact and argue that the Constitution of Georgia "*cannot be applied to Abkhazia*"² are wrong.

The ardent desire to restore the unity between the Georgians and the Abkhazs was probably not universal, but there was no Abkhaz leader of the time (including opposition) who openly objected to Abkhazia's autonomy in a single Georgian state. Moreover, it was Abkhazia that insisted on Georgia promptly endorsing the Constitution of Autonomous Abkhazia adopted by the People's Soviet of Abkhazia on 16 October 1920 to make the relations between the Centre and the Autonomy legally binding.

The State Status of Abkhazia in 1921-1931

The state and legal relations between the Georgian Democratic Republic and Autonomous Abkhazia, which stemmed from the progress achieved in 1918-1921, were completely destroyed when the Red Army of Bolshevik Russia brought down the legal government of sovereign Georgia. E. Eshba and N. Lakoba, two Bolshevik leaders of Abkhazia brought to power by the Soviets, based their anti-Georgian propaganda on the notorious slogan about the rights of nations to self-determination and moved forward with the idea of Abkhazia's independence from Georgia to become a

¹ **J. Gamakharia, B. Gogia.** Abkhazia – the Historical Region of Georgia, p. 466 [Emphasis added – **Z.P.**].

² **S. Lakoba.** *Answer to Historians from Tbilisi. Documents and facts.* Sukhumi, 2001. Sukhumi, 2001, p. 78 /in Russian/.

Soviet socialist republic. On 31 March, 1921 the Revolutionary Committee of Abkhazia, encouraged by the higher Communist Party structures, proclaimed Abkhazia the Soviet Socialist Republic; the same day it officially informed Lenin and did not fail to refer to the **“great liberation mission” of the valiant Red Army.**¹

On 21 May, 1921 the Revolutionary Committee of Georgia, in turn, officially recognized and hailed the newly independent Soviet Socialist Republic of Abkhazia with the reservation that “the question about the relations between the Georgian and Abkhazian SSR will be settled by the first congress of the Soviets of Workers’ and Peasants’ Deputies of both republics”.² In fact, the Kremlin leaders, the Georgian Communists, and the Abkhaz Bolsheviks knew in their heart of hearts that there could be no genuinely independent Abkhaz state. According to the Georgian and Abkhaz Bolshevik leaders, **Abkhazia’s independence was temporary – “for no longer than one minute”** as Nestor Lakoba put it.³

The fact that the Soviet Socialist Republic of Abkhazia had not been an independent state even before 16 December 1921 when it was united with the Georgian SSR under an agreement is confirmed by communist party and state documents of that period in which Abkhazia was treated as an autonomous part of “independent Georgia” (as Stalin put it).⁴ On 24 November, 1921 the

¹ **B. Sagaria.** The Creation and Strengthening of Public Authorities. *Formation of the SSR of Abkhazia.* – In: *History of the Abkhazian ASSR (1917-1937).* Sukhumi, 1983, p. 102 /in Russian/.

² **B. Sagaria.** The Creation and strengthening of public, p. 102.

³ **N. Lakoba.** Articles and Speeches. Sukhumi, 1987, p. 24 /in Russian/;
L. Toidze. Apropos of the Political Status of Abkhazia in 1921-1931. – *Investigations in the History of Abkhazia/Georgia.* Tbilisi, 1999, – *Investigations in the History of Abkhazia/Georgia.* Tbilisi, 1999, p. 302 /in Russian/, emphasis added – **Z.P.** available at [<http://b.sisauri.tripod.com/lit/politic/abkhazia.html>].

⁴ **A. Menteshashvili.** Historical Preconditions, p. 67.

Caucasian Bureau of the CC Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks) transferred the Abkhazian Organizational Bureau of the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks) under the supervision of the CC RCP (B) of Georgia. On 16 December, 1921 **Abkhazia became part of the Georgian SSR as a so-called republic under a treaty** according to the Union Treaty between the Socialist Soviet Republic of Georgia and the Socialist Soviet Republic of Abkhazia signed with great pomp in Tbilisi.

All the official documents of the congresses of soviets of Abkhazia and Georgia confirm that the Abkhazian SSR was incorporated into Georgia; the Constitution of Georgia of 1922 directly stated: *“The Autonomous Socialist Soviet Republic of Adjara, the South Ossetia Autonomous Region, and the Socialist Soviet Republic of Abkhazia are parts of the Socialist Soviet Republic of Georgia, which they joined voluntarily based on self-determination. The Socialist Soviet Republic of Abkhazia joined the Socialist Soviet Republic of Georgia on the basis of a union treaty between them”*.¹ The first Constitution of the Soviet Union clarified that the Transcaucasian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (TSFSR) as a subject of the USSR consisted of three socialist republics – Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan.² Abkhazia never was an independent founding member of the Soviet Union (even Georgia was not) – it was listed as an autonomous republic. More than that, under Article 15 (Chapter IV) of the Union Treaty, which was part of the Constitution of the USSR of 1924, *“the **autonomous republics of Adjara and Abkhazia** were not similar de facto to the autonomous regions of the RSFSR since, as distinct from the autonomous*

¹ **J. Gamakharia, B. Gogia.** Abkhazia – the Historical Region of Georgia, p. 485 [Emphasis added – **Z.P.**].

² *History of the Soviet Constitution. Collection of documents, 1917-1957.* Moscow, 1957, p. 227 /in Russian/; **J. Gamakharia, B. Gogia.** Abkhazia – the Historical Region of Georgia, p. 488.

republics of the RSFSR which had 5 deputies each in the Supreme Legislature of the Soviet Union, the Soviet of Nationalities, Adjara and Abkhazia could send only one representative each, that is as many as the autonomous regions of South Ossetia, Nagorno-Karabakh, and Nakhichevan".¹

As an autonomous republic, Abkhazia figures in the Soviet Constitution of 1924, which confirmed the article of the Union Treaty quoted above and pointed out: "*The **autonomous republics** of Adjara and **Abkhazia** and the autonomous regions of South Ossetia, Nagorno-Karabakh, and Nakhichevan send one representative each to the Soviet of Nationalities.*" **The autonomous status of Abkhazia within the Georgian SSR was also confirmed by the fact that its budget was part of the budget of Georgia while the government and party structures were accountable to the legislative and executive branches of Georgia and the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Georgia.** It should be said in this connection that at its **first regional conference of 7-12 January 1922 the Abkhazian organization of the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks) passed a decision to change the name to the Abkhazian Organization of the Communist Party (Bolsheviks) of Georgia and elected deputies to the First Congress of the Communist Party of Georgia.** Later, on 12-18 February 1922 the **First Congress of the Soviets of Abkhazia elected deputies to the First Congress of the Soviets of Georgia.**

This means that the Abkhazian SSR, which was declared in March 1921, and its so-called unification with the Georgian SSR were mere formalities: from the very beginning Abkhazia was regarded as an autonomous part of Georgia. This troubled those who in the past promised the separatist-minded groups of

¹ *History of the Soviet Constitution. Collection of documents*, p. 229; **J. Gamakharia, B. Gogia.** Abkhazia – the Historical Region of Georgia, p. 489 (emphasis added – **Z.P.**).

Abkhaz society that Soviet power would make Abkhazia an independent state. They went as far as trying to revise the state and legal context that had taken shape in 1921-1925 within which Abkhazia was part of the Georgian SSR. They drafted the first Constitution of Soviet Abkhazia approved by the 3rd Congress of the Soviets of Abkhazia in March 1925.

This document could hardly stand up to legal and political tests; in fact, its articles contradicted one another. While Article 4 of Chapter I stated: *“Having united on the basis of a special union treaty with the Georgian SSR, **the Abkhazian SSR, through Georgia, is part of the Transcaucasian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic and, through the latter, of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics**”*,¹ Article 5 of Chapter II of the same “Constitution” did not mention Abkhazia’s membership in the TSFSR and the USSR through the Georgian SSR. It merely stated: *“Sovereignty of the Abkhazian SSR given its voluntary joining the TSFSR and the Union of SSR is limited to and by the matters identified by the constitutions of these “Unions”*. The same article said further: *“The citizens of the Abkhazian SSR, while preserving their republican citizenship, are also citizens of the TSFSR and the Union of the SSR.”* And finally: *“The Abkhazian SSR preserves the right of free withdrawal both from the TSFSR and the Union of the SSR”*.²

In this way, these and some other articles of the Abkhazian “Constitution” withdrew Abkhazia from the state and legal field of the Georgian SSR. The higher Communist Party instances of Georgia and the Transcaucasus could not ignore these faults of the Abkhazian Constitution. The dressing-down Nestor Lakoba and the other Abkhaz leaders received from the higher party structures

¹ **J. Gamakharia, B. Gogia.** Abkhazia – the Historical Region of Georgia, p. 490 [emphasis added – **Z.P.**].

² **J. Gamakharia, B. Gogia.** Abkhazia – the Historical Region of Georgia, p. 490.

forced them to admit that the “Constitution was written in the silliest manner”.¹ The 3rd Session of the All-Georgia Central Executive Committee convened in Sukhumi on 13 June 1926 instructed the supreme legislature of the Abkhazian SSR to revise the Constitution to bring it in line with the Constitution of the Georgian SSR. This was done by the 3rd Session of the Central Executive Committee of the Abkhazian SSR on 27 October 1926. The revised document was finally endorsed by the 4th Congress of the Soviet of Abkhazia in March 1927.

The new version of the Abkhazian Constitution said: “**Abkhazia is a socialist state...** (not a **sovereign state** as the Constitution of 1925 described it. – **Z.P.**), **which by the force of a special treaty is part of the Socialist Soviet Republic of Georgia**” and “**the citizens of the Socialist Soviet Republic of Abkhazia, while retaining their republican citizenship, are, by the same token, citizens of the Socialist Soviet Republic of Georgia**”.² The Constitution of 1927 retained Abkhazia within the common Georgian state and legal expanse: “**The codes, decrees, and decisions of the All-Georgia Central Executive Committee**” were “**binding in the territory of the Socialist Soviet Republic of Abkhazia**”³ and “**the State budget of the Socialist Soviet Republic of Abkhazia**” was “**a component of the common budget of the Georgian SSR**”.⁴

The articles of the 1927 Constitution of the Abkhazian SSR quoted above disprove everything that was said about

¹ J. Gamakharia, B. Gogia. Abkhazia – the Historical Region of Georgia, p. 491.

² J. Gamakharia, B. Gogia. Abkhazia – the Historical Region of Georgia, p. 497 [Emphasis added – **Z.P.**].

³ J. Gamakharia, B. Gogia. Abkhazia – the Historical Region of Georgia, p. 500 [emphasis added – **Z.P.**].

⁴ J. Gamakharia, B. Gogia. Abkhazia – the Historical Region of Georgia, p. 502, emphasis added – **Z.P.**

Abkhazia's sovereignty as a Soviet republic that entered into equal federative state relations with Georgia. From the very beginning (since 1921), **the Abkhazian SSR was regarded as an autonomous unit of a single Georgian state.**

By the late 1920s, it had become abundantly clear that “the treaty of 16 December 1921 has lost its real significance” and that “*the formula of the contractual Abkhazian SSR has no real meaning*”.¹ This explains why in April 1930 the 3rd Session of the Central Executive Committee of Abkhazia passed a decision, on the strength of Nestor Lakoba's report, to replace the words “contractual republic” with the words “autonomous republic.” In February 1931 the 6th Congress of the Soviets of Abkhazia amended the Constitution on the strength of the decision of the 3rd Session. In this way, Abkhazia became the Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic of Abkhazia within the Georgian SSR.

The Abkhazian ASSR in 1931-1993

The new 1936 Constitution of the Soviet Union amended the country's federative structure: the Transcaucasian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic was abolished, while its subjects (the Georgian SSR, the Azerbaijanian SSR, and the Armenian SSR) directly joined the Soviet Union. There is a fairly well-justified opinion that in 1935-1936, when the new Soviet Constitution was drafted Nestor Lakoba tried to make the Abkhazian ASSR a direct subject of the Soviet Union² and failed.

In the 1950s (in 1957 to be more exact) certain separatist forces tried to exploit the thaw to stage the first “Abkhaz revolt”

¹ **B. Sagaria.** Transformation of the Contractual SSR of Abkhazia into an Autonomous Republic. – In: *History of the Abkhazian ASSR (1917-1937)*. Sukhumi, 1983, p. 250 (in Russian).

² **S. Lakoba.** Essays on the Political History of Abkhazia, p. 123.

in order to detach the Abkhazian ASSR from the Georgian SSR. The Georgian Communist leaders used one-sided repressions to pacify the “excitable Abkhaz.” Only the Georgians involved in the events were subjected to the Communist Party’s punishment while the leaders of the Abkhaz revolt moved even higher up the party ladder to fill in the top posts in the power structures. Ten years later, in 1967, Georgia reaped the bitter fruits of the capitulatory policy of the previous Communist Party leadership when Abkhazia became the scene of another anti-Georgian “revolt.” Once more separatists insisted on making Abkhazia a Union republic.

Again the Georgian leaders resorted to one-side measures that inspired the ideologists of national separatism and increased their popularity among the separatist-minded population groups. In 1977-1977 when the new 1977 Constitution of the USSR was drafted and approved members of the Abkhaz intelligentsia and the party and nomenklatura organized another demarche: they demanded that the state status of Abkhazia be changed. The new leadership of the Georgian Communist Party headed by Eduard Shevardnadze at first demonstrated a certain amount of boldness when dealing with the Abkhazian ASSR (1973-1977). However, later, in the fall of 1978, when the crisis reached its highest point, it agreed on concessions and, in fact, capitulated.

A new wave of separatism in Abkhazia rose in 1988 against the background of Mikhail Gorbachev’s *Perestroika* and *Glasnost* policy. It reached its height in the spring and summer of 1989 when, on March 18 “a gathering of all the Abkhaz” was held in the village of Lykhny (the Gudauta District). It was endorsed and attended by the highest party leaders together with Boris Adleiba, the First Secretary of the Abkhazian Regional Committee of the Communist Party of Georgia. It adopted a new appeal demanding that the status of the Abkhazian SSR should be restored to make it a Soviet subject in its own right.

The first blood was shed on 15-16 July 1989 in Sukhumi costing 9 Georgians and 5 Abkhazs their lives. However, the worst was avoided. In the fall of 1990 Georgia received a new leadership. After coming to power, the new top people and their leader Zviad Gamsakhurdia came face to face with trouble in the autonomies, in the so-called South Ossetian autonomous region in particular. To avoid a second front of sorts in Abkhazia President Gamsakhurdia had to accept Vladislav Ardzinba, the most odious figure among the separatists, as the elected chairman of the Supreme Soviet of the Abkhazian ASSR (the autonomous republic's highest post). The new Georgian president tried to ease the tension in the autonomous republic and frustrate the plans of the Soviet Union's leaders to use the "Abkhaz card" against Georgia, but he failed. Throughout 1991 (until 19 August) V. Ardzinba disobeyed the Georgian president: he was actively involved in the Kremlin's efforts to sign a new Union Treaty under which the autonomous republics were expected to become Union republics.

Despite the failure of 19 August putsch and the bankruptcy of a "refurbished Union" idea, President Gamsakhurdia gave V. Ardzinba another chance. He agreed to an "apartheid" election law under which the Abkhazs acquired the priority right to be elected to the Supreme Soviet of Abkhazia. As a result, the Abkhazs, who comprised 17 percent of the republic's total population, acquired 28 seats; the Georgians (45 percent of the total population) took 26 seats; and the rest (11 seats) went to other ethnic groups (Russians, Armenians, etc.).

Having won the simple majority in the republic's parliament Ardzinba and his retinue pushed aside everything they had promised and passed several far-reaching decisions that contradicted the interests of the state to which they belonged. The coup d'état that removed Zviad Gamsakhurdia and the period of turmoil that followed helped the separatists to realize their far-reaching plans.

The crisis in the relations between the two capitals reached its apogee when, on 23 July 1992, the Supreme Soviet of Abkhazia, having flagrantly violated its own rules and in the absence of the necessary number of deputies, “restored” the so-called Constitution of the Abkhazian SSR of 1925 that de facto removed Abkhazia from the Republic of Georgia.

This fateful step proved to be the last straw for the Georgian leaders, who still were reluctant to use power. Later, however, bloodshed became inevitable. On 14 August 1992 Vladislav Ardzinba and his cronies ordered their illegal military units to open fire on the internal troops of the Republic of Georgia moving across the territory of Abkhazia according to an earlier agreement between the Abkhaz and Georgian leaders. It started the confrontation which ended on 27 September 1993 in what the separatists call their “victory”. Nearly 300 thousand Georgians were thrown out of their homes. From that time on the jurisdiction of Georgia is not applied in Abkhazia, which is described as an unrecognized republic.

Conclusion

The above confirms beyond a doubt that contrary to the unfounded statements of separatist “historiography” and its patrons the territory now occupied by Abkhazia was, at all times, part of the common Georgian ethnic, cultural, political, and state universe. The Abkhazs, who developed into an ethnic group in the territory they now occupy, essentially never developed outside common Georgian history and, along with the Georgians, have been building a common Georgian statehood and Georgian Christian civilization.

ON NATIONAL, POLITICAL, AND CULTURAL SELF-IDENTITY OF THE SHARVASHIDZE PRINCELY FAMILY*

Throughout the centuries the representatives of Sharvashidze princely family were at the head of Abkhazia, first having the status of *Eristavi* (governor of a region) and later (from the 17th century) in the rank of the ruler. There is no consensus regarding the origins of this family and time of its promotion in historiography. The first representative of the Sharvashidze family, Dotaghod Sharvashidze (*Eristavi* of Abkhazia), is mentioned in connection with the events of the 1180s in the chronicle *Istoriani da Azmani Sharavandedtani* (“*Histories and Praises of Crowned Monarchs*”).¹

Some researchers consider that they must be the descendants of one of the representatives of the Shirvanshakh’s court who was transferred by the King David Aghmashenebeli (David IV “the

* First published as: **Z. Papaskiri**. On National, Political and Cultural Self-Identity of the Sharvashidze Princedom. In: “*Spekali*”. Electronic Bilingual Scholarly Peer-Reviewed Journal of the Faculty of Humanities at Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University (<http://www.spekali.tsu.ge/index.php/en/article/viewArticle/1/8/>). The text is printed with the clarifications, mentioned in the editor’s foreword.

¹ *Istoriani da azmani sharavandediani* (“*Histories and Praises of Crowned Monarchs*”). – *Kartlis Tskhovreba* (*The Georgian Chronicle*). Georgian Text verified according to all basic manuscripts by **S. Kaukhchishvili**, v. II. Tbilisi, 1959, pp. 33-34; *The History and Eulogy of Monarchs*. Translated and with commentary: **Dmitri Gamq’relidze**. – *Kartlis Tskhovreba /A History of Georgia/*. Editor in Chief of the Georgian and Russian editions: Academician **Roin Metreveli**; Editor in Chief of the English edition: Professor **Stephen Jones**. Artanuji Publishing. Tbilisi 2014, p. 142. Digital version see at: https://archive.org/stream/kartliscxovreba_201409/Kartlis%20Cxovreba%202012%20Eng_djvu.txt.

Builder”) to Abkhazia after joining Anisi to Georgia.¹ There also exists an opinion that the ancestors of Sharvashidzes played an active role within the Abkhazian *Saeristavo* (the administrative unit in Ancient Georgia) as far back as in the middle of the 11th century.² Thus, in the chronicle *Matiane Kartlisai* (“*The Chronicle of Kartli*”) there is mentioning of a certain Quabuleli Chachas-dze Otagho whose “*troops* (by order of the king Bagrat IV – **Z.P.**) *besieged the fortress of Anakopia ... Abkhazia*.”³ In this case, attention was paid to the similarity of the name of *Eristavi* (Sharvashidze) *D-otagho-d*, who lived in the 12th century, with the name of Quabuleli Chachas-dze **Otagho** on the base of which some researchers consider “Chachas-dze” to be the Georgian form of the surname – Chachba.⁴

In our view, the similarity between “Chachas-dze” and “Chachba” seems quite admissible although it is hard to imagine for

¹ **M. Brosset**. History of Georgia. Edition of **Niko Ghoghoberidze**. Part I, Tiflis, 1895, p. 154 /in Georgian/; **D. Gulia**. History of Abkhazia. V. I. Tiflis, 1925, pp. 138, 208 /in Russian/; **Z. Anchabadze**. From the History of Medieval Abkhazia (VI-XVII centuries). Sokhumi, 1959, p. 192 /in Russian/; **G. Anchabadze**. On the Origins of Sharvashidze Family. – *Georgian Source-Studies*. XI, Tbilisi, 2006, pp. 72-80 /in Georgian/.

² **N. Berdzenishvili**. A letter to an Editor. – *Literaturuli gazeti* (“*Literary newspaper*”), 8.II.1957, №6 /in Georgian/.

³ *Matiane Kartlisai*. – *Kartlis Tskhovreba* (*The Georgian Chronicle*). Georgian text verified according to all basic manuscripts by **S. Kaukhchishvili**. V. I. Tbilisi, 1955, p. 255; *Matiane Kartlisai* (*The Chronicle of Kartli*). Translated and with commentary: **Arrian Chanturia**. – In: *Kartlis Tskhovreba /A History of Georgia/*. Editor in Chief of the Georgian and Russian editions: Academician **Roin Metreveli**; Editor in Chief of the English edition: Professor **Stephen Jones**. *Artanuji Publishing*. Tbilisi, 2014, p. 156. Digital version see at: <http://science.org.ge/old/books/Kartlis%20cxovreba/Kartlis%20Cxovreba%202012%20Eng.pdf>.

⁴ **Sh. Inal-ipa**. Aspects of the Ethno-Cultural History of the Abkhazs. Sukhumi, 1976, p. 141 /in Russian/.

us how “Chachas-dze”–“Chachba” can be associated with Sharvashidze. As has been justly pointed out by Z. Anchabadze, the Georgian forms of the family names of the Abkhaz noblemen are directly derived from corresponding Abkhaz surnames: Marshania–Amarshan, Inalishvili–Inal-ipa, Anchabadze–Achba, Dziapshishvili–Dziapshipa, Marghania–Maan, etc. As to the surname of Sharvashidze, this is an exception to the rule. The Abkhaz form of this surname has nothing to do with its Georgian form (Sharvashidze). In Z. Anchabadze’s view, an old Georgian form of Sharvashidze–“Sharvash(i)s-dze literally means “the son of Shi(a)rvanshakh”.¹

The contemporary historical science has no definite answer concerning the origins of the Sharvashidze family, although it is evident that in the late Middle Ages they themselves unambiguously expressed their belongness to the Abkhaz-Apsua ethnos. However, this does not mean that the mentioned Sharvashidze princely family created its own Abkhaz national state in isolation from the Georgian national-political and cultural universe. On the contrary, it can be stated without any doubt that despite a certain estrangement caused by the intrusion of kindred tribes of Djik-Abkhazs from the North Caucasia in the 16th-17th centuries and their expansion first within the boundaries of the Principality of Abkhazia and later more to the south, Abkhazia still remained an integral part of the common Georgian national, political and cultural world in the late medieval period, and the representatives of the Sharvashidze princely family unequivocally identified themselves with the all-Georgian social and political system.

Georgian national and political world of that period also identified the Sharvashidze family, the rulers of Abkhazia to be an integral part of Georgian national-political and cultural world. This

¹ **Z. Anchabadze.** From the History of Medieval, p. 194; **Z. Papaskiri.** The Territory of Abkhazia in the 11th-15th centuries. – *Investigations in the History of Abkhazia/Georgia.* Tbilisi, 1999, p. 179 /in Russian/.

fact is most vividly expressed by the 17th century Georgian poet Peshangi Khitarishvili in his poem “*Shakhnavaiani*”. According to the poem, Solomon Sharvashidze, the then ruler of Abkhazia, declined to confront the King by backing the Odishi Queen Elene Gurieli.¹ It is quite correctly noted in historiography that Solomon Sharvashidze considered Vakhtang V to be not only the King of Kartli, but the King of All Georgia and thus his suzerain.²

Although they had deviated from Christian way of life, the rulers of Abkhazia even at that time respected the Catholicoses of “Abkhazia” (West Georgia) and considered them as their spiritual fathers, even in the period when the residence of a Catholicoses of “Abkhazia” was transferred from Bichvinta to Gelati. This is evident from the fragment of Kvapu Sharvashidze’s oath book to Catholicos of “Abkhazia” David Nemsadze: “*We, the prince Kvapu Sharvashidze and my brother Kerekim have written this oath book and grant it to You, Catholicos David of North and Abkhazia...*”.³ There have been preserved other “oath books” including “*Sapitsris Tsigni*,” which was presented to the “Abkhazian” Catholicos Grigol (Grigol Lordkipanidze – **Z.P.**) by the same Kvapu Sharvashidze and his son Avtandil.

¹ **Peshangi**. *Shakhnavaiani*, v. I. Edited by **G. Leonidze** and **S. Jordanishvili**. Tbilisi, 1935, pp. 73-74 /in Georgian/; **B. Khorava**. *The Relationships between Odishi and Abkhazia in the 15th-18th Centuries*. Tbilisi, 1996, p. 104 /in Georgian/.

² **B. Khorava**. *The Relationships between Odishi and Abkhazia*, p. 103; **Z. Papaskiri**. *Essays on the History of Contemporary Abkhazia. Part I. From Antiquity to 1917*. Tbilisi, 2004, p. 101 /in Georgian/. Digital version see at: <http://sites.google.com/site/Z.Papaskiri/publications-georgian>.

³ **S. Kakabadze**. *Ecclesiastic Documents of the West Georgia*, part I. Tiflis, 1921, p. 88 /in Georgian/; **B. Khorava**. *The Relationships between Odishi and Abkhazia*, p. 117; **Z. Papaskiri**. *Essays on the History of Contemporary Abkhazia. Part I*, p. 106.

In spite of turning to primitive state that actually caused the fall of cultural standard of the region, Abkhazia still remained in the sphere of Georgian written culture and literacy. This is evident from the “oath books” and other official documents composed in Georgian language, which were issued from the administration of the Abkhazian ruler. These materials directly indicate that Georgian was the only official language at that time in Abkhazia. Even in the second half of the 18th century when the Ottoman Empire intensified the pressure on Abkhazia and forced some representatives of the Sharvashidze principedom to convert into Islam, Abkhazia was not isolated from the common Georgian national and cultural universe. It is not accidental that the majority of Sharvashidze family, including those converted into Islam by force (e.g. Rostom, Manuchar and Zurab Sharvashidze – second half of the 18th century), had traditional Georgian names. Moreover, Georgian names are found in the Ubikh tribes related to Abkhazs. For instance, in the first half of the 19th century, the leaders of the Ubikhs were **Levan Tsanubaia** – (Megrelian transcription of “Tsanba”)¹ and **Zurab Khamish**.²

Despite certain peculiarities, the intrusion of Djik-Abkhaz tribes initiated by the Sharvashidzes, and their settlement on the territory of historical Odishi must be regarded as feudal strife. The representatives of the Sharvashidze princely family when widening their lands at the expense of neighboring Samegrelo-Odishi territory as was already mentioned above, did not think at all about the creation of some Abkhaz-Apsua national-state formation separated from the common Georgian state and political system. Their major goal (as well as that of Megrelian Dadianis and Gurian Gurielis) was

¹ *Acts, collected by the Caucasian Archaeographic Commission* (further: *ACAC*). Ed. by **A. Berge**. Vol. IV. Tiflis, 1870, pp. 426, 429, 953 /in Russian/.

² *ACAC*, vol. IX, part I. Ed. **A. Berge**. Tiflis, 1884, p. 505 /in Russian/.

to advance on the inner political arena and get the leading positions in the Georgian state and political universe, i.e. the Sharvashidzes could not imagine themselves in isolation from the Georgian national-state and cultural-political world.

On the contrary, the Sharvashidzes tried hard to occupy the Dadiani's place and even the throne of the Imeretian Kingdom at the earliest opportunity. This is evident from Sorekh Sharvashidze's attempt to capture a throne of the Odishi Principality at the beginning of the 1780s.¹ The fact that the representatives of the Sharvashidze's house were not going to stop at the Inguri and even had planned to intrude into the central regions of Samegrelo is clearly seen from Kvapu Sharvashidze's actions. He crossed the Inguri River, seized the important strategic point of Rukhi and turned it into his residence.² It is known that Kvapu Sharvashidze died in Rukhi in 1704. It should be noted that Grigol Lordkipanidze, the Catholicos of "Abkhazia" (West Georgia), specially arrived from Gelati to perform the funeral ceremony and took the so-called *nishani* (special payment in favor of the church: personal belongings of the deceased, weapon, horse, lands) from the family of the dead.³

Besides the above-mentioned Kvapu Shevashidze's "oath books," the epistolary heritage of Kelesh-Bei Sharvashidze and his successors: Giorgi (Sapar-Bei) Sharvashidze and Mikheil Sharvashidze as well as other official documents issued from their "chancellery," is the evidence of the fact that the representatives of the Sharvashidze principedom unconditionally identified themselves with Georgian cultural-political and state universe. It is

¹ **B. Khorava.** The Relationships between Odishi and Abkhazia, p. 114.

² **B. Khorava.** The Relationships between Odishi and Abkhazia, p. 121.

³ *Monuments of Georgian Law.* Prepared for publication **by I. Dolidze**, v. III, Tbilisi, 1970, p. 670 /in Georgian/; **B. Khorava.** The Relationships between Odishi and Abkhazia, p. 122.

known for certain that these rulers conducted their official and non-official correspondence only in Georgian language. It should be mentioned that this fact is proved even by the officials of the Russian administration in the Caucasus. Namely, the Russian General Kotsebu, being at Mikheil Sharvashidze's court stated: "*Georgian was the written language used by the family of the Princes Sharvashidze*".¹

From this viewpoint, we would like to single out the message written by the prince Kelesh-Bey Sharvashidze (20th May 1806) to his nephew Sosran-Beg in Georgian language. This letter arouses interest from different viewpoints, but in this case, the special significance has to be given to the fact that it was composed following all norms of documents writing elaborated in medieval Georgia. Besides this, attention should be paid that this happened not in Samurzakano region, which was more integrated with the rest Georgia, but in the so-called heart of Abkhazia, at the court of the ruler who was considered "true Muslim." This part of Abkhazia also lived in the conditions of the serfdom and feudal system („რიგო ბატონყმობისა“ /"rigi batonq'mobisa"/) which was common for the whole Georgia. Despite certain "barbarisation" of Abkhazia in the 16th-17th centuries, which, as was already mentioned above, was caused by a new inrush of highland tribes, all this indicates that

¹ **Sh. Chkhetia.** On the History of the Abkhaz Principality. – In: "*Historical Herald*", №15-16, 1963, p. 154 /in Russian/; **Z. Papaskiri.** Abkhazia: Unfalsified History. Second edition. Tbilisi, 2010, p. 122 /in Russian/. Digital version available at: <http://dspace.nplg.gov.ge/bitstream/1234/29865/1/AbkhaziaIstoriaBezFalsifikacii.pdf>. Fragments of the official correspondence and the epistolary inheritance of the mentioned representatives of the Abkhaz sovereign House of the Sharvashidzes see in: **Z. Papaskiri.** Essays from the History of Contemporary Abkhazia, p. I, pp. 105-108, 120, 122, 126-127, 129-130, 166-170, 186; **Z. Papaskiri.** Abkhazia: Unfalsified History, pp. 88, 89, 96, 98, 101, 102, 120, 124, 128, 138.

this region still was a part of Georgian feudal system and Georgian remained as the official language of the principedom.

The all-Georgian national-state and cultural-political mentality of the Sharvashidze princely family were most vividly manifested in the so-called “Pleading Points” (on putting the Principedom of Abkhazia under the protectorate of the Russian Empire) composed in Georgian language by prince Giorgi (Sefer-Bey) Sharvashidze.¹ It is justly noted in historiography that there definitely was a political idea in the procedure of the preparation and presentation of the “Pleading Points”.² In composing the document in Georgian language, the ruler of Abkhazia clearly demonstrated to the Russian counterpart (and the whole world) that in the foreign relations the Principality of Abkhazia represented the Georgian national-state and cultural world at the beginning of the 19th century.

It should be noted that the representatives of the Sharvashidze family usually based their pleading concerning the entrance of the Principality of Abkhazia under the protection of the Russian Empire on historical obstacles. For example, this is what Manuchar Sharvashidze, the head of Samurzakano, wrote to General Pavle Tsitsianov in connection with this: ***“Earlier I was subordinated to Grigol Dadiani and by his order, I signed the item***

¹ The Georgian text see in: newspaper “*Sakhalkho Ganatleba*”, 31 May, 1989; **Z. Papaskiri**. Essays on the History of Contemporary Abkhazia, p. I, pp. 126-128.

² The text of the “*Pleading Points*” („სათხოვარი პუნქტები” /“*satxovari punktebi*”/) was first composed at the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, then it was translated into Georgian and, as an original, was signed and sealed by Giorgi Sharvashidze (it was also certified by other Abkhaz noblemen), and along with the Russian text it was presented to the Russian government. See: **G. Paichadze**. Abkhazia as Part of the Russian Empire (1810-1917). – *Investigations in the History of Abkhazia/Georgia*. Tbilisi, 1999, p. 217 /in Russian/.

presented by you signed ... as far as our country was... and we have no right".¹

And finally, the most important argument that the representatives of the Princely family of Abkhazia identified themselves as an integral part of common Georgian Orthodox Christian world is that the last leader of Abkhazia Mikheil Sharvashidze and his son Giorgi Sharvashidze were buried in the Mokvi church and the epitaph on their grave is carved in old Georgian script Asomtavruli. It should be also mentioned that even after the abolishment of the Principality of Abkhazia (1864) by the Russian Empire the representatives of the Sharvashidze family always emphasized that they were Georgian noblemen.²

While considering national, state, cultural, and political identity of the Sharvashidze principality one cannot help mentioning the activities of Giorgi Sharvashidze, publicist and public figure, an outstanding representative of the Georgian literature of the 19th-20th centuries, the son and heir of Mikheil Sharvashidze, the last ruler of Abkhazia.

¹ *ACAC*, vol. II. Ed. **A. Berge**. Tiflis, 1868, p. 536 /in Russian/, the emphasis added – **Z.P.** In connection with this, it is also not of less importance that the Russian Empire in every possible way promoted the so-called "historical obstacles" and emphasized historical unity of Abkhazia and the rest of Georgia. This is clearly seen from the notification sent by General Pavle Tsitsianov to Count A. Vorontsov to St. Petersburg dated to 27 October, 1803 where he states that Kelesh-Bey Sharvashidze and his principality in the 15th century represented the province of Iveria (*ACAC*, vol. II, p. 463). There was another Governor General Gudovich who emphasized Abkhazia's historical belongness to the Georgian Christian world (*ACAC*, vol. III. Ed. **A. Berge**. Tiflis, 1869, pp. 208-209 /in Russian/).

² From this viewpoint it is of particular importance Aleksandr Sharvashidze's known remark: "*I am not Abkhazian but Georgian nobleman*" (see: **N. Berdzenishvili**. *Issues of Georgian History*. Tbilisi, 1990, p. 611 /in Georgian/ [Emphasis added – **Z.P.**]).

There is no doubt that Giorgi Sharvashidze is a tragic person. Being still young he appeared as a leader of a strong anti-Russian rebellion (the Abkhaz uprising of 1866) because of which he suffered persecution by the Russian regime during his whole life. Being brought up according to the best traditions of the Georgian feudal aristocracy Giorgi Sharvashidze felt love and devotion both for his native Abkhazia and his big motherland – Georgia which he used to call Iveria since childhood. It is not questionable that he, first of all, regarded the whole Georgia, and not just Abkhazia proper, as his native land. However, this does not give us a reason to question his, and the Sharvashidze family in general, belonging to the Abkhaz ethnic world in the late medieval period. Giorgi Sharvashidze who was definitely Georgian historically and culturally was well aware of his own Abkhazness. The vivid illustration of this is his poetic masterpiece *Varada* (an Abkhaz refrain) in which he emotionally expresses his wish not to be cut from his Abkhaz roots: *“Oh, my God!/ Help me not to degrade/ And sometimes to hum/ My ancestors’ Varada”*.¹

As Academician Simon Janashia justly puts it, *“Only on the ground of deep feeling and understanding of the uniqueness of the native environment could have grown such a masterpiece as it is Abkhazian song “Varada” coming from the depths of the soul, poetic embodiment of lyrical emotion”*.² And this Abkhaz, who wholeheartedly loved his native Abkhazia and was a brilliant expert of his own land and the Abkhaz language,³ at the same time was a true son and patriot of Georgia, his big motherland, and never missed an opportunity to stand steadily on Georgia’s guard,

¹ **G. Sharvashidze.** Selected works in two volumes. Vol. I, Kutaisi. 2006, p. 97 /in Georgian/.

² **S. Janashia.** Giorgi Sharvashidze. Cultural and historical sketches. – *Works.* Vol. VI. Tbilisi, 1988, p. 22 /in Georgian/.

³ **S. Janashia.** Giorgi Sharvashidze, p. 21.

protect its national and cultural values and give an adequate response to those who expressed hostility to his big motherland.

A good example of this is Giorgi Sharvashidze's letter to the editor of the German newspaper "*Berliner Tageblatt*" as a response to the article published by the correspondent Lorenz. In this article, the journalist recollected his trip to Gagra where he was invited by Prince Oldenburg. According to the journalist, during the party "*the representatives of the local elite who served the table*" stole "*the coat of one of the guests*". Lorenz also wrote about Tbilisi with a kind of scorn noting that "*there people and animals are in the same position*". Giorgi Sharvashidze responded to this libel in the following way: "***the people he (Lorenz – Z.P) referred to so scornfully have wonderful historical past ... Georgians were the knights taking part in crusading wars of the of the first advocates of Christianity, stood at the gates of the Caucasus, not for the purpose of breaking into foreign lands and plunder other people's good, but to defend the fatherland; to protect Christian culture and civil life... Georgians have the richest ancient epic literature which can be compared with world works... In the hierarchy of Georgian kings and people the names of outstanding heroes and people of wisdom can be found***".¹

It is clearly seen from this letter that for Giorgi Sharvashidze, the Abkhazs and Abkhazia are an integral part of Georgia. It is a single cultural-political and state system. He is proud of this motherland common for the Abkhazs and the Georgians. That is why in 1917 when the contours of the revival of Georgian state

¹ See: *The letter of His Serene Highness G. M. Shervashidze sent by him to the Editorial board of the newspaper Berliner Tageblatt.* – Newspaper: "*Transcaucasian speech*" («*Закавказская речь*»), №146, 1911; **S. Lekishvili.** Giorgi Sharvashidze. Documentary materials. – In: "*Historical Herald*", №31-32. Tbilisi, 1975, pp. 85-86 /in Russian/ [emphasis added – **Z.P.**].

appeared, Giorgi Sharvashidze whole-heartedly welcomed the beginning of a new epoch. In connection with this, of special interest is his letter published in the newspaper "Sakartvelo" /"Georgia"/: "Although **our homeland Iveria** has had all kinds of big cultural challenges, **our** past was built in such time that **we** have lost the path of national evolution. Yes, **we** can speak boldly that if not bad fortune, today we would have been ahead of Europe... At a time when the conscious part of the fragmented **Iver people** stood arms folded at the graves of their former greatness, now suddenly the voice of justice and freedom! Georgia raises the alarm, cries hurray, hurray!"

Against the background of such national awakening, Giorgi Sharvashidze's heart is broken because other slogans are heard: "We do not want freedom, we do not look for the autonomy, all peoples in the world are united and we only want to provide benefits to the working people. To do this, take away the estates of the landlords and give it to peasants, down with titles and private ownership on land ... **and thus the bright sun of national liberation and revival set down to earthly calculations**".¹ Really one cannot but admire Giorgi Sharvashidze's inspiration in the spirit of Ilia Chavchavadze.

Giorgi Sharvashidze's national pain as of a fervent patriot of Georgia, loving his native land, always concerning his country's fate, is remarkably rendered in his poem *Response to V.O.*, which was written in Batumi as a response to Vakhtang Orbeliani's verse – *Amer-Imers*. Because of the censorship, *Response to V.O* was not published in the newspaper *Droeba*. Giorgi Sharvashidze shared the patriotic pathos of his friend poet and with a heavy heart recalled the past when Georgia was powerful and united.²

¹ **G. Sharvashidze**. Socialist realism and Georgia. – Newspaper "Sakartvelo" ("Georgia"), №137-140, 25-29 June 1917; **G. Sharvashidze**. Selected works, v. I, pp. 306-307 /in Georgian/ [Emphasis added – **Z.P.**].

² This verse have been found and published by S. Lekishvili. See: **S. Lekishvili**. Giorgi Sharvashidze. Documentary materials, pp. 256-257 /in Georgian/.

Giorgi Sharvashidze was very upset that the feeling of unity had been lost among Georgians, the whole country was consumed with envy and strife from within: *“Some small groups, diversity of ideas,/ Oh! where is the glorious Georgian of old times!”*.¹

Here for known reasons we will refrain from the detailed analysis of this remarkable poem written by Giorgi Sharvashidze, it is to be evaluated by experts. We only state that this poem can be put in rank with the most outstanding samples of Georgian patriotic lyric.

Giorgi Sharvashidze’s image as of Georgian public man, the man concerning about native Georgian literature, Georgian language is remarkably manifested in one more publication: *On the Georgian Language*.² In this article, he appears as an active defender of Georgian literary traditions. He strongly disapproves *“of bad translation from foreign languages”*. In Giorgi Sharvashidze’s opinion, this expresses a tendency to the *“degeneration of the native language”*.³ He is also greatly concerned about increased haphazard usage of foreign words in the Georgian language. In author’s view *“one should borrow foreign words and terms only in the extreme case when there is no equivalent in Georgian... it is necessary to try to enrich **our language** and not make it extinct”*.⁴ As is seen Giorgi Sharvashidze’s attitude to his native written language is very much like Ilia Chavchavadze’s.

In conclusion, while speaking about Giorgi Sharvashidze’s national-state and cultural-political image one cannot help mentioning his speech at the so-called *“gathering of the Abkhazs”* on 8

¹ **S. Lekishvili.** Giorgi Sharvashidze. Documentary., pp. 256-257.

² Newspaper *“Sakartvelo” (“Georgia”)*, №169, 1915 /in Georgian/.

³ Newspaper *“Sakartvelo” (“Georgia”)*, №169, 1915; **S. Janashia.** Giorgi Sharvashidze, p. 20.

⁴ Newspaper *“Sakartvelo” (“Georgia”)*, №169, 1915; **S. Janashia.** Giorgi Sharvashidze, p. 20-21 [Emphasis added – **Z.P.**].

November 1917. This meeting organized by the Abkhazian nationalistic leaders with anti-Georgian attitude trampled down the centuries-old Georgian-Abkhaz historical unity and linked the future of the Abkhaz people to the so-called “Union of the Caucasian Highlanders”. The well-pronounced anti-Georgian zeal of the “gathering” and orientation caused a protest on the part of Georgian statesmen. As is mentioned by Mikheil Tarnava, known for his separatist attitudes, the meeting was attended by Akaki Chkhenkeli, member of the Russian State Duma (IV), a representative of the “Ozakom” (“*Special Transcaucasian Committee*” – a supreme body of Russian Provisional Government in Transcaucasia) and other celebrated people among which was Giorgi Sharvashidze.

Giorgi Sharvashidze addressed the participants of the “meeting” in the Abkhaz language, explained the essence of the recent developments in Russia, congratulated with the closeness of the freedom and called to the friendship and collaboration with Georgian people: *“You better follow your elder brothers, take joint actions and fight for gaining freedom and self-preservation. I know some of you may not like such a view of mine as you are looking in the direction of Moscow and I am looking at Tbilisi. There is no other choice and has never been for Abkhazia but a close connection with Georgia and sharing her sorrows and joy”*. After this speech, being disappointed with anti-Georgian demarche of his brethren Giorgi Sharvashidze left the hall never to return.¹ Three months later on 19 February 1918, Georgia was shocked by the news that came from Sokhumi regarding the death of a great patriot.

The unexpected death of Giorgi Sharvashidze, a true pillar of Georgian-Abkhazian historical fraternity and unity, at the

¹ *Estrangement Beginning (1917-1920)*. – Newspaper “*Tetri Giorgi*”, 1931. Berlin /in Georgian/; **D. Chitaia**. Abkhazian Issue in the First Georgian Republic. Abkhaz People’s Council in 1917-1921. Tbilisi, 2006, pp. 125-126 /in Georgian/.

beginning of 1918 when newly appeared Abkhazian leaders tried hard to detach his native area from the rest of Georgia, was somehow a symbolic event. An ardent patriot of Georgia, his great motherland, more than once provoked rage from the Russian authorities because of his uncompromising position. His heart could not bear the disloyalty of his compatriots. It was evident that the new Abkhaz leaders were having totally different ideals. They could not and did not wish to follow Giorgi Sharvashidze's path. It was not for this purpose that "mother Russia" nurtured them up.

This fact did not pass unnoticed for the eminent representatives of the Georgian society of that time. This is what was said in Giorgi Sharvashidze's funeral speech by known Georgian public man Niko Tavdgiridze: *"Those Abkhazs who were respected by foreigners because of you, for the freedom of whom you sacrificed all your glorious career, all your belongings, wealth, did not even notice your arrival here... They did not benefit from your being here... To ignore you was a crime... What injustice, what an irony of fate: you have sacrificed all your celebrated energy... for the freedom of your small country Abkhazia, the only treasure that had value to you – and you welcomed it gathering your last strength as a Biblical Simon but your beloved people – the Abkhaz did not respond you, failed to appreciate you and followed the leaders brought up with Russian mentality against whom you were fighting and sacrificed all your happiness"*.¹

Such is our study of the national-state and cultural-political self-identity of the Sharvashidze princely family. Naturally, the presented article cannot have a claim to study the given issue completely and thoroughly, but even from the given material, it is obvious that the representatives of the Sharvashidze family in the

¹ *Teatri da cxovreba (Theatre and Life)*, №10, 1918; **G. Sharvashidze**. Selected works in two volumes. V. II, Kutaisi. 2006, pp. 39-40 /in Georgian/.

course of the Middle Ages and later (until the abolishment of the Abkhazeti Principality and later) unambiguously identified themselves with the common Georgian national-state and the cultural-political universe and represented an integral part of Georgian political elite.

THE ETHNO-DEMOGRAPHIC PICTURE OF THE PRESENT-DAY ABKHAZIA FROM THE ANCIENT TIMES TILL OUR DAYS*

The General Survey

The ethnical situation was always complex in the present-day Abkhazia. There can be no doubt today that approximately from the middle of the 1st millenia B.C. when the first specific written data became available in the ancient Greek historical sources, the present-day Abkhazia was settled by the Colchians (Megrelians-Zans, Svans), who represented the Georgian tribes: Kolas, Koraxs, Colchis, Heniokhs, maybe even Moskhis-Meskhis.¹ The Colchians were considered as a collective name, therefore it might have united some non-Georgian (maybe, Abkhaz-Adigh) tribes too.²

Beginning from the 1st-2nd cc. A.D. the new tribes, namely Sanigs (from the 1st c. B.C.), Apsils, Abazgs, later Misiamians, appeared at the territory of the present-day Abkhazia. There is no doubt in the Georgian origin of Sanigs and Misimians, as well as of the Lazs, who were living in the southern and, possibly, even in the

* First published in *Proceedings of Sokhumi State University*. XVI. Humanities, Social and Political Sciences Series. Tbilisi, 2017, pp. 266-276 /<https://www.sou.edu.ge/images/dxp/humanitarul-da-socialur-politikur-mecnierebaTa-seria---2017-1530705181.pdf/>.

¹ **M. Inadze**. Problems of the Ethnopolitical History of Ancient Abkhazia. – *Investigations in the History of Abkhazia/Georgia*. Tbilisi, 1999, p. 61, 67 /in Russian/, pp. 61, 67; **M. Inadze**. Issues of Ethnical and Political History of Ancient Abkhazia. – *Matsne*, History Series, #1, 1992, p. 8 /in Georgian/; **D. Muskhelishvili**. The Historic Status of Abkhazia in *Georgia's* Statehood. – *Investigations in the History of Abkhazia/Georgia*. Tbilisi, 1999, p. 115.

² **Z. Papaskiri**. Essays on the History of Contemporary Abkhazia. Part I. *From Antiquity to 1917*. Tbilisi, 2004, p. 31 /in Georgian/.

northern part of the present-day Abkhazia. Meanwhile, most scholars consider the Apsils and the Abazgs as the ancestors of the present-day Abkhazs. They were settling in a small area of the present-day Abkhazia (approximately between the rivers Galidzga or Mokvi and Kelasuri). **It is clear that the Georgian tribes – Lazs, Sanigs and Misimians – were the main population of the region.** At the same time, it should be mentioned that notwithstanding the fact whether the Apsils and Abazgs were the ancestors of the present-day Abkhazs or not, or whether they lived originally in Abkhazia or not, **the present-day Abkhazs, as an ethnos, were formed in Georgia, namely in Abkhazia and they represent the symbiosis of the Adigh-Circassian and Georgian (mainly Megrelian) tribes.**

Abkhazia remained ethnically diverse in the Middle Ages too, although the main population were the Georgian tribes. It was true during the existence of the kingdom of the “Abkhazs”. Although the leaders of this political unit were denoting themselves as the kings of the “Abkhazs”, it was not **the national state of the ethnical Abkhazs**, as it is groundlessly stated by the Abkhaz historians. From its foundation, the kingdom of the “Abkhazs” was the Georgian national state. Moreover, the foundation of the kingdom of the “Abkhazs” was a milestone in the history of the Georgian statehood. It was, in substance, the first Georgian national state with Georgian national Christian ideology and Georgian state language in Western Georgia. Leon II and his heirs, irrelevant of their ethnical descentance (it does not matter whether they really had the Abkhaz-Apsua origins or not), were the Georgians in the political, state, and cultural essences. They were building the unified Georgian (not just Western Georgian) state – “Sakartvelo” and not the national Abkhaz state – “Apsny”.

This western Georgian state, the kingdom of the “Abkhazs”, was the legal successor of the Ancient Colchis and of the Lazika-Egrisi kingdoms of the later times. From the times of Leon II, the

founder of the kingdom of the “Abkhazs”, there were three administrative units – *Saeristavos* – fully or partially located directly within the territory of the present-day Abkhazia. Only one of them was called with the tribal name – Abkhazeti. According to Z. Anchabadze, it covered the territory from Anacopia (New Athos) to Nikofsia (northern to the present-day Tuapse).¹ This is clear evidence that the Abkhaz tribes mainly lived within the territory of the above-mentioned *Saeristavo*. As it is correctly mentioned by the academician N. Berdzenishvili, “*the tribal belongingness was the defining principle for the creation of Saeristavo, the administrative unit during the feudal era*”.²

Based on the incorrect understanding (by academician K. Kekelidze, whose opinion was later shared by S. Kaukhchishvili) of one reference (“*At that time the eristavis in Imeria, beyond the mountains of Likhi, were Baram Vardanisdze in Svaneti, K'akhaber in Rach'a and Tak'veri; Otagho Sharvashidze was in Tskhumi, Amanelisdze in...*”)³ during a certain period historians had a wrong notion that during the reign of King Tamar the *Saeristavos* of Abkhazeti and Tskhumi were merged into one administrative unit because of their alleged sameness in ethnical component, i.e. they

¹ **Z. Anchabadze.** From the History of Medieval Abkhazia. Sukhumi, 1959, p. 177 /in Russian/.

² **N. Berdzenishvili.** Issues of Georgian History. T. III. Tbilisi, 1966, p. 278 /in Georgian/.

³ *Istoriani da azmani sharavandediani (“Histories and Praises of Crowned Monarchs”). – Kartlis Tskhovreba (The Georgian Chronicle).* Georgian Text verified according to all basic manuscripts by **S. Kaukhchishvili**, v. II. Tbilisi, 1959, pp. 33-34; *The History and Eulogy of Monarchs.* Translated and with commentary: **Dmitri Gamq'relidze.** – *Kartlis Tskhovreba /A History of Georgia/.* Editor in Chief of the Georgian and Russian editions: Academician **Roin Metreveli**; Editor in Chief of the English edition: **Professor Stephen Jones.** Artanuji Publishing. Tbilisi 2014, p. 142. Digital version see at: https://archive.org/stream/kartliscxovreba_201409/Kartlis%20Cxivreba%202012%20Eng.djvu.txt (Emphasis added – **Z.P.**).

were settled by the tribes who had the Abkhaz (Apsua) origins.⁴ Later, after the more thorough study of the Tamar's Chronicle, the scholars⁵ came to a well-grounded conclusion that Amanelis-dze had to be the *Eristavi* of Tskhumi, not the *Eristavi* of Argveti, as it was considered by K. Kekelidze.⁶ Based on above-said, it is clear that there was no merger of Tskhumi and Abkhazeti *Saeristavos*. Thus, there is no reason to believe that the population of those *Saeristavos* was ethnically the same.

Of course, all this does not mean that the Abkhazs could not live outside the Abkhazeti *Saeristavo*, in Tskhumi *Saeristavo* or anywhere else within the other region of the Georgian kingdom. Nevertheless, the fact that during the rule of Leonids (9th-10th cc.) and the successors to Bagrat III, i.e. in the unified Georgian kingdom, the name "Abkhazeti" was given to a specific region, the northern part of the present-day Abkhazia, and it did not cover

⁴ **Z. Anchabadze.** From the History of Medieval., pp. 177-178.

⁵ **G.Tskitishvili.** To the Understanding of One Passage from "The History and Eulogy of Monarchs". – *Georgia in the Epoch of Rustaveli.* 1966, pp. 222-227 /in Georgian/; **II. Antelava.** Materials for Clarification and Interpretation of the text of "The History and Eulogy of Monarchs". – In Book: **II. Antelava.** Georgian Historical sources of the 11th-15th centuries. Tbilisi, 1988, pp. 42-47 /in Georgian/; **D. Gogoladze.** On the Issues of the Ethnos Aboriginality and the Identity of the Ethnoses in the "Apkhazs *Saeristavo*," Present-Day Abkhazia. Tbilisi, 1995, pp. 12-14 /in Georgian/; **M. Bakhtadze.** Institute of *Eristavoba* in Georgia. Tbilisi, 2003, pp. 45-49 /in Georgian/.

⁶ Despite this, the latest edition of "Kartlis Tskhovreba" (The Georgian Chronicles) does not take into account the well-founded and reasonable conjecture of the above-mentioned scholars and repeats the version belonging to Kekelidze and Kaukhchishvili (See: *Istoriani da azmani sharavandediani ("Histories and Praises of Crowned Monarchs")*. – *Kartlis Tskhovreba*. Editor in Chief **Roin Metreveli**. Tbilisi, 2008, p. 408 /in Georgian/; *The History and Eulogy of Monarchs*. Translated and with commentary: **Dmitri Gamq'relidze**. – *Kartlis Tskhovreba /A History of Georgia/*, 2014, p. 142.

the territory of Tskhumi *Saeristavo*, clearly shows that the ethnical Abkhazs were settled in the Abkhazeti *Saeristavo*. Meanwhile, if the ethnical Abkhazs were living within the territory of Tskhumi *Saeristavo*, and this was the defining factor in the administrative-state division, it is impossible to understand why the Saeristavos of Abkhazeti and Tskhumi were created as separate units from the beginning, during the reign of Leon II, who is credited with the administrative division of the country by the Georgian historical tradition.⁷

The ethnical, social, cultural, and economic situation at the territory of the present-day Abkhazia was drastically changed in the 15th-16th cc. In a short time Abkhazia, the highly developed feudal region where the Georgian Christian culture and literacy were flourishing, became an underdeveloped province with the primitive patriarchal system and revived pagan beliefs. Historians connect the changes in the social, economic and cultural life of Abkhazia with the ethnical and demographic processes that were happening in the region, i.e. with the appearance of the new wave of the related highland tribes. The Georgian historical perception has clearly fixed the capture of the territory of Odishi “till the Egrisi River” by the newly-came Djiks and Abkhazs and their settlement there (*“the Abkhazs were settling”*).⁸ Therefore, any statement that the Abkhaz-Apsuas were the only aborigine population of the present-day Abkhazia (from the river Psou to the river Enguri) has no ground and cannot hold water.

At the end of the 17th c., when the border of the Abkhazian principality reached the banks of Enguri River, the Apsua-

⁷ **Prince Vakhushti**. Description of Georgian Kingdom. – *Kartlis Tskhovreba (A History of Georgia)*, Vol. IV. The Georgian text prepared according to all the main manuscripts by **S. Kaukhchishvili**. Tbilisi, 1973, p. 780.

⁸ **Prince Vakhushti**. Description of Georgian Kingdom, p. 780.

Abkhazs began to settle southern to riv. Ghalidzga too. According to one story, which definitely is based on historical reality, Kvapu Sharvashidze had brought to his domain several noble families, namely Anchabadzes, Emukhvaris, Inal-ipas (Inalishvilis), Marghanias, Zvanbaias, Lakerbaias, Akirtavas, etc., from the Bzipi Abkhazia.⁹ Kvapu himself had founded the Samurzakano branch of Sharvashidzes. (The territory between the rivers Ghalidzga and Enguri is called Samurzakano.) Besides the above-named noble families, there also were moved the Abkhaz peasants with their families. Despite this, the population of the Ghalidzga-Enguri interfluvium remained mainly Georgian (Megrelian). As for the other parts of the present-day Abkhazia, especially the region between Tskhumi-Sokhumi and riv. Ghalidzga, the aborigine Georgian (mainly Megrelian) population had to leave and resettle in the central regions of Samegrelo-Odishi. The part of them were captured and sold into slavery, the others were forcibly moved to Bzipi region.

There is no doubt that the most of the Abkhazs, who live today in the Bzipi-Gudauta region and have the Georgian (Megrelian) surnames, are the descendants of those Georgians (Megrelians) who were forcibly removed from their lands and were resettled in the Bzipi Abkhazia. (At the same time, it does not mean that there was no Georgian population in that region previously.) The same can be said about the Abkhazs, who live in the region of Ochamchire-Tkvareli, although there are many among them, who have Georgian (Megrelian) surnames, but have “forgotten” their Georgian roots a few decades ago, either during the nationalist-separatist regime of Nestor Lakoba (the 1920s and the first part of the 1930s) or in the 1960s-1980s when the pro-Abkhaz nationalist-separatist situation was created once again.

⁹ **B. Khorava.** The Relationship between Odishi and Abkhazia in the 15th-18th Centuries. Tbilisi, 1996, pp. 116-117 /in Georgian/.

Therefore, the statements of our Abkhaz colleagues (among them T. Achugba¹ has to be mentioned particularly) that the Abkhaz-Apsuas² were the only aborigine population at the territory of the present-day Abkhazia, are utter nonsense and cannot withstand any substantial scholarly criticism.³ The separatist historians and politicians are actively speculating about the ethno-demographic situation in Abkhazia following the departure of the *Muhajirs*. Their leader in this “battle” is Stanislav Lakoba, one of the standard-bearers of the separatist ideology. He has started his insinuations in a book which was published in 1990⁴ and then continued to expand them in his following publications. His libel on I. Gogebashvili’s 1877 article in the newspaper “*Who*

¹ **T. Achugba.** On the Problems of National Self-Consciousness of the Population of South-Eastern Abkhazia. Sukhumi, 2006 /in Russian/ (http://apsnyteka.org/927-achugba_t_izbrannye_stati.html#6); **T. Achugba.** Ethnic history of the Abkhazians in the 19th-20th centuries. *Ethnopolitical and Migratory Aspects*. Sukhumi, 2010 /in Russian/ (http://apsnyteka.org/file/Achugba_Etnicheskaya_istoriya_abkhazo_v_19-20_.pdf).

² The term Apsua is used in order to differentiate the predecessors of the Abkhazs in general, among whom were the Georgian (mainly Megrelian) tribes too, from the Abkhaz-Apsua population who descend directly from the Adigho-Abkhazs.

³ See: **S. Bakhia-Okruashvili.** The Identity of Samurzakanoans and Some Historical and Ethnological Problems Related to It. – *Nodar Shengelia – 75*. Tbilisi, 2010 /in Georgian/; **I. Kvashvilava.** Mythology of Abkhazian Historiography about Samurzankano. Tbilisi, 2012; **M. Toria.** Theoretical Justification of Ethnic Cleansing in Modern Abkhazian Historiography. 25/11/2011 (http://eng.expertclub.ge/portal/cnid_10378/alias_Expertclub/lang_en/tabid_2546/default.aspx/); **K. Kvashilava.** From the Historical Past of Samurzakano. *The Turn of XVII-XVIII Centuries – 1840*. Tbilisi, 2011, pp. 9-11 /in Georgian/. (https://www.academia.edu/27954810/FROM_THE_HISTORICAL_PAST_OF_SAMURZAKANO.pdf).

⁴ **S. Lakoba.** Essays on the Political History of Abkhazia. Sukumi, 1990 /in Russian/.

Should Populate Abkhazia” should be specially mentioned.¹ S. Lakoba considers this work to be the first policy statement from the Georgians and says that it started a “*hundred years’ war*” of Georgians against the Abkhazs.²

The Georgian scholars, first of all, S. Lekishvili, who used the same statistical data, based on the scholarly analysis of other documental sources, showed the absurdity of the ethno-demographic picture of Abkhazia of the end of 19th c. and of the first half of the 20th c., which was given by S. Lakoba.³ In the latest years, the previously unknown documents were brought to the daylight by various scholars. They clearly show that there was Georgian (mainly Megrelian) population not only in Southern Abkhazia, but also north to the Gumista River before the 1860s-1870s (in the 1830s).⁴ Some other data also proves that the Georgians were the main population of Sokhumi before the 1866, departure of the Muhajirs. For example, the official edition of the Russian administration in the Caucasus, the newspaper “*Kavkaz*” was mentioning that on March 3, 1866 the specialized school for the girls was open in Sokhumi and five Abkhaz girls, among others, were accepted. The reporter was writing: “*I heard that many Abkhaz parents want to send their daughters to this school but have troubles with their housing, since **there is no permanent local Abkhaz population in Sukhumi*** (Emphasis added –

¹ *Tiflisskij Vestnik (Тифлисский вестник)*, №№ 209, 210, 243, 244, 245, 246, 248, 249), September-November 1877 г. /in Russian/ (<http://abkhazia.narod.ru/gogeba.htm>).

² **S. Lakoba.** *Hundred Years' War of Georgia against Abkhazia.* Gagra. 1993 /in Russian/.

³ **S. Lekishvili.** In Answer to Historian S. Lakoba. – *Public Education* (Newspaper *Sakhalkho ganatleba*), June 14, 1990, pp. 9, 14 /in Georgian/.

⁴ **G. Gasviani.** *Abkhazia. Old and New Abkhazians.* Tbilisi, 1998, pp. 153-161 /in Georgian/; **B. Khorava.** *The 1867 Abkhaz Muhajirs.* Tbilisi, 2004, pp. 123-170 /in Georgian/.

Z.P.) and they do not want to house them with the Russians or **Megrelian merchants** (Emphasis added – **Z.P.**) because of their poorness or of their religious prejudices.” This publication clearly shows that the permanent local population of Sokhumi, even before the 1866 uprising, were not the Abkhazs, but the Georgians (Megrelians). There is also an interesting document, according to which in 1864 the population of Sokhumi was comprised from: “a. Locals: Megrelians 450, Greeks, 217, Armenians 78, Russians 25. b. Outsiders: foreigners 320, officers 42, officials 42, merchants 5. No Turk or **Abkhaz has settled in town**”.¹

While analysing the ethno-demographic situation in Abkhazia during the last quarter of the 19th c. and the beginning of the 20th c., we cannot avoid mentioning one more insinuation of the Abkhazian separatist “historiography”, this time regarding the ethnical belongingness of the so-called “Samurzakanoans”. The Abkhaz scholars (first of all, S. Lakoba and T. Achugba) add them to the Abkhazs and are trying to increase the number of the Abkhazs in an artificial way. Their reasoning is based on some (very unreliable) statistical data of the 1886 and 1897 censuses when the Samurzakanoans were intentionally counted as the Abkhazs. The Georgian scholars (A. Totadze, S. Lekishvili and others) have shown the incorrectness of their reasoning and gave the specific numbers how the exact number of the Abkhazs was changing from census to census. Thus, in 1886 the Abkhazs were 28323, while the Samurzakanoans were 30640. Nevertheless, the total number of the Abkhazs, according to the census, was 58963. It is easy to find out that the total number was received by adding the number of the Samurzakanoans to the number of the Abkhazs proper. Moreover, there exists other statistical data, which is avoided by S. Lakoba. According to the 1883 census, the number of the Abkhazs

¹ **S. Lekishvili.** In Answer to Historian's S. Lakoba, p. 14 (Emphasis added – **Z.P.**).

is 27526 and the number of Samurzakanoans is 25424. In 1914 the Abkhazs were 42073. In 1917 their number decreased and became 38121, while in 1923 it was equal to 36816.¹

Along with the decrease in the number of the Abkhazs, the Georgian population was increasing. If in 1886 (when the Samurzakanoans were added to the Abkhazs) the Georgians were only 25873, in 1923 their number became 71181. The most interesting event happened in 1926 when the number of the Abkhazs, in three years, increased from 36816 to 55918. As it is correctly mentioned by S. Lekishvili, there were neither demographic factors (emigration, repressions, epidemic diseases, etc.) which would result in significant decrease the number of the Abkhaz population in 1897-1923 nor the demographic explosion in 1923-1926 that would increase the population by nearly 20000.² The only explanation to this can be the manipulation with the number of the Samurzakanoans. During the censuses of 1886, 1897, and 1926 they were counted as the Abkhazs, while in 1914, 1917, and 1923 they were counted as the Georgians. It should be mentioned that even Nestor Lakoba, the leader of the Abkhaz Bolsheviks, was officially talking in 1926 that the *“number of the Abkhazs was around 57-60 thousand if stretching a point. Why stretching a point? Because several thousands are considering themselves as the Abkhazs, but their language was not the Abkhaz, but the Megrelian.”* N. Lakoba even admitted that the Megrelians were Georgians and they had to be considered as Georgians.³

Despite the above-mentioned, we cannot deny that there really was a migration of the Georgian (mainly Megrelian) population from the neighbouring regions to Abkhazia beginning from the 1860s-1870s. At first, the Russian Imperial government did

¹ **S. Lekishvili.** In Answer to Historian's S. Lakoba, p. 9.

² **S. Lekishvili.** In Answer to Historian's S. Lakoba, p. 9.

³ **N. Lakoba.** Articles and speeches. Sukhumi, 1987, p. 213 /in Russian/.

not pay attention to this process, but soon they found that *“the Georgians, mainly Megrelians, were strongly opposing the development of the Russian civic-mindedness in Abkhazia.”*¹ The Russian administration in the Caucasus prevented the migration of the peasants from Zugdidi and Senaki Uyezds to the inner parts of Abkhazia. It is known that in 1872 Emperor Alexander II approved the special “rules” that *“had to prevent the migration to the Abkhazian lands of the settlers from Western Georgia.”*² Those “rules” were an addition to the “regulations” of 1870, according which the government was giving the status of the “finally settled” to the persons who lived in Abkhazia before January 1, 1865. The others were considered only as a “temporary settlers.” The breaking of the rule was strictly prohibited. S. Lakoba refers to the fact which was mentioned in the Georgian media of those times (newspaper *“Sasoplo gazeti”*) that the Megrelian peasants who had settled in the Ochamchire “okrug” were expelled from there by the head of the Sokhumi department.³

Beginning from the 1890s, the imperial administration was no longer hiding its discriminative policy towards Georgians. From this point of view, the special attention has to be given to the *“Aide-mémoire regarding the colonization of Sukhumi okrug”* which was written by colonel Bracker, the Head of the Administration of Sukhumi okrug in 1895. It says: *“The settlement of the foreign elements in Sukhumi okrug, **which was allowed at the beginning... especially the migration of Megrelians, has to be stopped immediately. It is desirable to preserve more free lands to settle solely Russian people**”.*⁴

¹ **A. Silagadze, V. Guruli.** Historical-Political Essays. Tbilisi, 2001, p. 309 /in Georgian/.

² **S. Lakoba.** Essays on the Political History of Abkhazia, p. 40.

³ **S. Lakoba.** Essays on the Political History of Abkhazia, p. 40.

⁴ **S. Lakoba.** Essays on the Political History of Abkhazia, p. 40. [Emphasis added – **Z.P.**].

Regarding the ethno-demographic processes in Abkhazia, one of the key issues in the Abkhaz separatist ideology is the so-called “mass settlement of the Georgians” in Abkhazia in the 1930s – the beginning of 1950s. Basically, this term covers the process of the organized migration of people, who lost their homes to the earthquake in Western Georgia. According to separatists, this was the intentional action from the Georgian Communist government, which had the purpose of Georgianization of Abkhazia. Based on the proper data, the Georgian historiography has shown that beginning from the Ancient times to the 20th c. the Georgians were always prevailing in numbers over the Abkhazs in Abkhazia. Therefore, the demagogical statements from certain Abkhaz historians and politicians that the Georgian majority in Abkhazia was formed only in the 1830s-1840s thanks to the “organized mass settlement” of the Georgians, are false and represent the falsification of the historical reality.

There is no doubt that the Abkhaz population in Abkhazia would be greater in numbers in the 1930s-1940s if there were no migration of the “Muhajirs”, which was inspired and provoked by the Russian Empire. It also cannot be denied that after the migration of the “Muhajirs” from Abkhazia, their place was taken by the representatives of other nations: Russian, Armenians, Greeks, and, of course, Georgians (especially, from Western Georgia). Nevertheless, our Abkhaz colleagues forget the fact that the number of the Russians in Abkhazia was increased 70 times (nearly the same rate is correct for the Armenian population of Abkhazia too) in 1886-1989. They count only Georgians, who have migrated not to another country, but to one of the ancient provinces of their own country – Georgia.

Yes, we have to remind to everyone, do they like it or not, **historically Abkhazia has always been a part of the unified Georgian ethnical, cultural, political, and state universe. It**

was the native land not only for the Abkhazs, but, first of all, even to a greater degree, for the Georgians too. Therefore, the migration of Georgians from one part of their country to another cannot represent the political action against anyone. Of course, it is correct for organized settlement of the Georgians, which took place in 1937-1953 too.

We have also to point out that it was one country, one state, which was officially called “Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic” and “Abkhazian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic” was its part. Therefore, the migration of the population from one region to another within one state cannot be a criminal act, as it is declared by some Abkhaz historians and politicians. Their statements simply have no logical sense. Moreover, there is no secret that there had been only one, Soviet citizenship during the Soviet times and everyone in the Soviet Union was the **“citizen of the Soviet Union”**, not the citizen of Georgian SSR (and of course, no one could be a citizen of the Abkhazian ASSR). Hence, **any citizen of this country could choose the permanent place of residence throughout the whole country.** (Because of the existence of residence permit, there were some restrictions for acquiring registration in the big cities.) As for the “organized re-settlements” (we do not mean in this case the forced expulsion of certain nations, who were declared “guilty”), they were common in the Soviet Union and Abkhazia was not an exception. Usually, they were caused by economic reasons. One can remember the settlement of hundreds of thousands of Russians in Kazakhstan, where the virgin lands had to be cultivated. The Russians in great numbers were moving to the national republics when the giant industrial objects were built. One need not go far to find examples. Several Russian settlements were founded in Zugdidi, Tsalendjikha and Gali regions when Enguri hydroelectrical plant and Enguri pulp and paper mill were built in Zugdidi region.

The tragical events of 1992-1993 which resulted in the ethnical cleansing of the aborigine Georgian population in Abkhazia, drastically changed the ethno-demographic picture of the region. According to the census, which was conducted by the separatist regime in 2011, there are 240 705 permanent residents in Abkhazia. Among them 122 175 /50.8%/ are Abkhazs, Georgians – 46 199 /19.3%/, Russians – 22 064 /9.2%/, others – 5 167 /1.21%/.¹ This statistical data is dubious in many aspects, but the “demographic explosion” among the Abkhazs is out of any bounds. Even the Russian experts paid attention to this and were surprised by the record increase among the Abkhaz population. They use relevant data to prove the falsification. For example, known Russian journalist A. Epishev writes that “*in the Soviet times from 1959 to 1989, during 30 years, the Abkhaz population was increasing by approximately 1000 people a year. Meanwhile, in the hard post-war eight years, from 2003 to 2011, the increase was nearly 28,000, around 3,500 per year,*” and asks: “*Is it possible?*”² The 2011 census data contradicts with the observations of the Abkhaz specialists too. The known Abkhaz economist B. Baratelia says that in the post-war Abkhazia “*the birth-rate has dropped by 47 children annually*”.³ Even the Abkhaz experts, who heavily antagonized against Georgians, are paying attention to the “non-natural” increase of the Abkhaz population,⁴ which can be

¹ *The Population of Abkhazia* /in Russian/ (<http://www.ethno-kavkaz.narod.ru/rnabkhazia.html>).

² **A. Epishev.** Enough to feed Abkhazia! 2012 /in Russian/ – [http://news-ru.blogspot.com/2012/02/blog-post_19.html], Emphasis added – **Z.P.**

³ **A. Kuchuberia.** Every year in Abkhazia, 47 children are born less than in the previous year. – *The Caucasian knot (Kavkazskij uzel)*. 25.12. 2007 /in Russian/ (<http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/131606>).

⁴ **V. Sharia.** Political demography. – *The Echo of the Caucasus*. 03.01. 2012 /in Russian/ (<http://www.ekhokavkaza.com/content/article/24441325.html>).

explained only by adding the number of Georgians to the Abkhazs (of course, if the whole data is not falsified).

This is a brief picture of the ethno-demographic processes at the territory of the present-day Abkhazia from the Ancient times till our days.

ON NEW ANTI-GEORGIAN INSINUATIONS OF THE SUPPORTERS OF “INDEPENDENT” ABKHAZIA

**In connection with A. Epifantsev’s article
“*The Georgian Church: Paul Turned into Saul.
The Question of the Church*”***

After a “heroic” venture of the Russian “Armada” in Georgia during August of 2008 and of Putin’s comic recognition of Abkhazia and so-called South Ossetia as independent states, the Kremlin tries in vain to convince the world society of the correctness and legality of its open and unprecedented bold aggression, undertaken toward the sovereign Georgian state. Vladimir Putin and his team, headed by President Medvedev, do not manage to gain an understanding of this question even from the states, if not actual satellites at least considered to be strategic partners of the Russian Federation. Obvious in this case is the position of the CIS countries. Even those that are members of the “Organization of Collective Security,” categorically dissociated themselves from the adventurous policy of official Moscow. Further, some leaders of these states behave very defiantly and do not give way to pressure nor to blackmail – on the part of the “elder brother.”

In this situation, we must note the leader of the Republic of Belarus – “subject equal in rights to the proverbial Union State.”¹

* First published in: *Certain Aspects of Georgia-Russian Relations in Modern Historiography*. Caucasus Region Political, Economical, and Security Issues. NOVA publishers. New York, 2014, pp. 9-28. The text is printed with minor clarifications, mainly of personal and geographical names.

¹ Now there is no doubt that a new imperial project of the Kremlin, a treaty concerning the creation of a “Union state” between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Belarus, solemnly signed by the leaders of the two countries in 1999 finally failed. (Treaty on creation of

He does not behave as an obedient vassal but as should the leader of a civilized sovereign state, stubbornly refusing to support legalized lawlessness imposed upon the world society by the masters of the Kremlin who have lost all reason. No less worthily does Armenia, the main strategic partner of Russia in the Caucasus conduct itself. In this respect, it should be highly appreciated the extremely warm reception of the President of Georgia in Armenia in June 2009 when the President of Armenia decorated the Georgian leader, who “had committed a crime against humanity” as Kremlin tops asserted,¹ with the highest state decoration of Armenia² and

an union state. <http://www.rg.ru/2008/05/26/dogovor-dok.html>.) It is not fortuitous that after a series of extremely serious conflicts between Moscow and Minsk, experts already began to speak either about the “comatose state” of “the Union state” and even about a possible lethal outcome of this incomprehensible formation. See: **O. B. Cherkovets**. A Union State without a Union. – *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 29.10.2009 /in Russian/. Digital Version: http://www.ng.ru/politics/2009-10-29/3_kartblansh.html.

¹ *Russia will insist on instituting criminal proceedings against M. Saakashvili for having committed a crime*. The statement of the Chairman of the Federation Board Sergei Mironov. See <http://www.garant.ru/news/14219> /in Russian/.

² Given to citizens of foreign states “*for the defence of the state and national interests of the Republic of Armenia, for special services in strengthening independence, democracy, for establishing, strengthening and developing friendship with the republic of Armenia, and also for a significant contribution into the cause of strengthening peace among peoples*”. The friendly gesture of the President of Armenia towards his Georgian colleague, as was expected, was met with indignation by the political establishment of Russia, assessing the given step of President Serzh Sargsyan as “*an insult to Russia*”. It was Vladimir Gusev, the first deputy chairman of the Committee on the economic policy enterprise and property of the Federation Council, a representative of the FC from Ivanovo District, a former deputy chairman of the Soviet of Ministers of the USSR, who openly declared it, adding to it that real friends do not act so, and that “*this act on the*

the scientific board of Yerevan State University awarded Mikheil Saakashvili with the title of an Honorary Doctor.

The hopes of Russian diplomacy that were connected with the investigation of the Heidi Tagliavini commission were fully dispelled. In spite of the contradictory and unconvincing character of some of the conclusions of the Commission concerning the escalation of the situation in the so-called “South Ossetia” on the eve of the unjustified large-scale Russian invasion of Georgia, the Commission, on the whole, placed the main blame of instigating conflicts in Georgia upon Russia. Russian diplomacy completely loses all the debates at various international forums before the Council of Europe, European Parliament, OSCE, etc. The whole civilized world condemned the aggressive actions of Moscow, especially the recognition of the separatist regions within Georgia and without the slightest hesitation confirmed Georgia’s territorial integrity and appealed to Russia to observe international legal regulations. Of course, against this background, the political breaches of S. Lavrov’s department in the direction of international and diplomatic recognition of the “independence” of Abkhazia and so-called “South Ossetia” seem ridiculous. It is quite evident that the recognition of the “independence” of Abkhazia and South Ossetia on the part of Nicaragua, Venezuela, Nauru, “ Hamas” (which is considered as a Palestine terrorist organization) and, a short time ago, by unrecognized Nagorno-Karabakh, will discredit any independence in the eyes of the world society, rather than will result in the appearance of these separatist enclaves of Georgia as sovereign states at the international arena.

part of our neighbours can create a complicated atmosphere in Russia-Armenian relations”. See **Vladimir Gusev**: Having awarded the order of Honour to Saakashvili, Armenia insulted Russia. The Federation News. 26.06.2009. <http://www.regions.ru/news/2223706/in-Russian/> [Emphasis added – **Z.P.**].

From the political and diplomatic side, the situation is deplorable for Russia. The Kremlin tops and the forces of Russian society, which have imperial inclinations, lay special stress on the further informational and ideological treatment of society by means of vile falsifications of the history of Georgia. In recent years, we have to note a certain Andrei Epifantsev, who achieved great success with a number of published articles to discredit Georgia and the Georgians.¹ Of course, all the “works” of this newly-found “genius” of Russian historical and political thought,² is not worth a farthing. Therefore, I would not think it worthwhile to approach it seriously. But, unfortunately, Russian public opinion is held captive by such deceptive and demagogic propaganda of imperially-disposed intrigues of the “epifantsevs,” ill with “anti-Georgian psychosis.” At the same time, to ignore such “masterpieces” of the man who has gone too far in his falsifications does not seem to be justified. Nevertheless, we are far from the thought (at least in this article) to give an all-embracing answer to all the “discoveries” of our “coryphaeus” and will limit ourselves to the

¹ See: **A. Epifantsev**. Has Georgia Ever Been Russia’s Ally? Political Model of the Survival of the Georgian State. The project of the Institute of National Strategy. Agency of Political News (27.01.2009). <http://www.apn.ru/publications/article21261.htm> /in Russian/; **A. Epifantsev**. The Georgian Church: Paul, Turning into Saul. The Question of the Church. Agency of Political News (22.09.2009), <http://www.apn.ru/publications/article21981.htm> /in Russian/; **A. Epifantsev**. National Outlying Districts of Georgia. Conditions of Disintegration. Agency of Political News (26.01.2010): <http://www.apn.ru/publications/article22327.htm> /in Russian/.

² The author of these lines, a post-graduate student of Moscow State University by M. Lomonosov, who prepared and defended his candidate’s thesis there under the supervision of prominent Russian scholars Acad. B. Ribakov and a corresponding member of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR A. Novoseltsev, regrets a lot that amateurs like A. Epifantsev, with their delirious conclusions, disgrace the Russian historical science with its traditions.

remarks concerning the publication dedicated to the Apostolic Orthodox Church of Georgia¹ in which the author simply throws dirt at one of the most ancient pillars of Christianity and its current leader.

The reason for the appearance of an opus by this “omniscient” Russian “expert” rose due to critical comments by senior hierarchs of the Georgian Orthodox Church concerning uncanonical actions of priests disposed towards separatism, in efforts to remove Abkhazia from the jurisdiction of the Georgian Church. Indignant at the declarations of his Holiness and Beatitude Ilia II, the Catholicos-Patriarch of all Georgia, and of the leaders of the Georgian Orthodox Christian Church, the great advocate of “independent” Abkhazia was especially offended by the words of the spiritual leader of Georgia that “No one can declare independence from the main church.”² A. Epifantsev accuses him of preconception.

According to his assertion, “*the Patriarch has forgotten that approximately ninety years ago there was a church that **willfully declared independence from the main church** (i.e., the Russian Orthodox Church – Z.P.) **and that this was the Georgian Church, itself***.”³ Still more, “in 1917, taking advantage of disturbance and disorder, Georgia declared independence from the Russian Empire and **immediately attacked Russia’s territory, seizing Abkhazia and part of the Russian Black Sea coast territories: Adler, Sochi, Tuapse, Khadzhensk and other places/villages/cities/towns that had not belonged to her since the 15th and 16th centuries**. Surprisingly, the Georgian Church does the same. Representatives of the Georgian clergy on the bayonets of their armies, entered Abkhazia, drove out the Russian clergy from there

¹ A. Epifantsev. The Georgian Church.

² A. Epifantsev. The Georgian Church.

³ A. Epifantsev. The Georgian Church. [Emphasis added – Z.P.].

and declared that thenceforth the canonical territory of Abkhazia would belong to the Georgian Church.”¹

Epifantsev does not end with these insinuations concerning the history of Georgia and the Georgian Church. He cannot conceal his annoyance over the fact that, according to the Georgian historic tradition, the acquisition of autocephaly by the Georgian Church took place in the 5th century. His annoyance is no less evident in stating the fact of the annulment of the Georgian autocephaly after the occupation and annexation of Georgia by Russia at the beginning of the 19th century. As Epifantsev remarks, “without going into detail, since the annulment of the autocephaly of the Georgian Church is the subject of significant independent research, connected not only with Georgia and the Caucasus, but with the Russian Church itself, with the principle of Sobornost, etc.” Nevertheless, he quite categorically declares the Georgian vision of the problem as an extremely one-sided position, allegedly allowing “the Georgian party to inject the serum of their truth appropriately to people.”

With irony, our “omniscient chronicler” speaks of the “acquisition of independence by the GOCCh (Georgian Orthodox Christian Church – **Z.P.**) in the 5th century,” loudly declaring that Abkhazia has nothing to do with this Church. “From the 7th century, an autocephalous episcopacy was established under the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Constantinople and remained for at least five centuries. Following the expansion and development of the Georgian state, the religious questions in the Abkhazian principality fell under the influence of Kartvelian kings. By its essence, in those days the same thing took place, for which now Georgia crucifies Russia in connection with themselves. The Georgians factually, having the right of a more powerful nation, abolished the autonomy of the Abkhazian episcopacy and spread their

¹ **A. Epifantsev.** The Georgian Church. [Emphasis added – **Z.P.**].

influence over Abkhazia... and in our times began to consider this justification for the fact of controlling the Abkhazian church!"¹

There is one essential defect in these "wise ideas," that is the incompetence of the author in the questions of the history of Georgia of Medieval times. Epifantsev simply does not realise that the "*Abkhazian autocephalous episcopacy*" *under the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Constantinople patriarchy from the 7th century did not last for 5 centuries. By the 10th century,*² it

¹ **A. Epifantsev.** The Georgian Church. [Emphasis added – Z.P.].

² For the information of the newly turned up defender of the Abkhaz "national" church on the question of acquiring the independence of the church by the kingdom of the "Abkhazs" there is quite a vast historiography (see in detail **N. Berdzenishvili.** The Institute of Viziers in Feudal Georgia. – In: **N. Berdzenishvili.** Questions on the History of Georgia. Vol. III. Tbilisi, 1966, p. 45 /in Georgian/; **K. Kekelidze.** Studies on the History of Old Georgian Literature. Vol. IV. Tbilisi, 1957, pp. 354-355 /In Georgian/; **P. Ingorokva.** Giorgi Merchule – Georgian writer of the 10th century. Tbilisi, 1954, p. 245 /in Georgian/; *Georgica.* The Information of Byzantine Writers about Georgia. The Greek Text with the Georgian Translation published and supplied with commentary by **S. Kaukhchishvili.** Vol. IV, part II. Tbilisi, 1952, pp. 196-201; **Z. Anchabadze.** From the History of Medieval Abkhazia. Sukhumi, 1959, p. 146 /in Russian/; **M. Lordkipanidze.** Appearance of New Feudal States. – In: *Essays on the History of Georgia.* II. Tbilisi, 1988, p. 289 /in Russian/; **M. Lordkipanidze.** The Abkhazian Kingdom. – *Investigations in the History of Abkhazia/Georgia.* Tbilisi, 1999, p. 159 /in Russian/; **V. Goiladze.** At the Beginning of the Georgian Church. Tbilisi, 1991, pp. 168-175 /in Georgian/; **B. Diasamidze.** Christianity in Western Georgia /1st-10th cc./. Batumi, 2001, pp. 200-2002 /in Georgian/; **B. Kudava.** The Constantinople Patriarchy and the Church Centres of Western Georgia (9th c.). – In: *Istoriani.* Collection of Scientific Papers Dedicated to the 60th anniversary of **Roin Metreveli** Birth. Tbilisi, 2000, p. 47 /in Georgian/; **B. Kudava.** On the History of the Abkhaz Catholicosate. 9th-13th centuries. – *Georgian Diplomacy.* Annual, 9. Tbilisi, 2002, p. 565 /in Georgian/; **T. Koridze.** History of the Abkhaz Catholicosate (9th-16th cc.). Synopsis of thesis to obtain the degree of the candidate of history. Tbilisi, 2003, pp. 9-10; **J. Gamakharia.** Abkhazia and Orthodox Christianity /1st c. – 1921/.

became a church organization independent of Constantinople.

The organization was called the “Catholicosate of Abkhazeti.” Incidentally, from the very beginning (and not after five centuries) this was formed as a West Georgian organization (not as a national church of the Abkhazs) within the Georgian Church. By the 10th century, the Georgian language was the language of church services and state clerical work and replaced the Greek language in Western Georgia and on the territory of the present-day Abkhazia.¹

Tbilisi, 2005, pp. 117-118 (in Georgian); **Z. Papaskiri**. On the Question of Dating the “Abkhaz” Catholicosate. – In: *Shota Meskhia – 90*. Special Volume dedicated to the 90th anniversary of **Shota Meskhia**. Tbilisi, 2006, pp. 201-213 /in Georgian/; See also the given work in the book by **Z. Papaskiri**. And Georgia Has Risen from Nicopsia to Daruband. Tbilisi, 2009, pp. 171-183 (<http://dspace.nplg.gov.ge/bitstream/1234/29982/4/NikopsiidanDarubandamde.pdf>) /in Georgian/; and so on. In spite of insignificant disagreement among the above-mentioned researchers, all of them agree on the question that the Western-Georgian church freed itself from the control of Constantinople not later than the 10th century. And what is more, a supposition has been expressed lately, according to which the acquisition of the sovereignty of the church by the kingdom of the “Abkhazs” could have taken place “at the request” of the “Abkhaz” party against the background of a warming of the Byzantine and Western Georgian relations, noticeable after Bagrat I became king, thanks to the active military-political support of the Byzantine empire (see **Z. Papaskiri**. Towards the Specification of the Foreign-policy Orientation of the “Abkhazs” kingdom. – *Georgian Diplomacy*. Annual, 6. Tbilisi, 1999, pp. 325-335. See also the given work in the book by **Z. Papaskiri**. And Georgia Has Risen from Nicopsia to Daruband. Tbilisi, 2009, pp. 184-195 /in Georgian/), and that the given event should be viewed as the first real political fruit of the political cooperation of official Kutaisi and Constantinople (**Z. Papaskiri**. On the Question of Dating, pp. 201-213).

¹ From this point of view it is impossible to ignore the fact that the earliest Georgian inscription was discovered not in the Eastern districts of Western Georgia (somewhere in Imereti) but within the borders of the present-day Abkhazia. We mean the inscriptions in the ancient Georgian script Asomtavruli from the church Msighua (Gudauta District) discovered by an Abkhaz researcher A. K. Katsia (see **A. K.**

Epifantsev's assertion that "***in the time of the development and expansion of the Georgian state*** (according to the stated chronological reference points – after 5 centuries "from the 7th century," i.e. somewhere in the 12th century. – Z.P.) ***religious questions in the Abkhazian principality really fell under the influence of Kartvelian kings***", resulting from this as if "***the Georgians factually, being a more powerful nation abolished "the autonomy of the Abkhazian episcopacy"*** is beyond criticism. Firstly, "***the development and expansion of the Georgian state,***" as A. Epifantsev writes, began, at least, from the end of the 10th century (this does not coincide with his chronological references) when nobody else but the king of the "Abkhazs," Bagrat III Bagrationi (978-1014) himself started the final stage of uniting all the Georgian lands. During the last years of this monarch's rule, the process ended with the creation of the unified Georgian state. It is not important that this state in almost all foreign languages (and sometimes also in Georgian written sources of the 11th-12th centuries) was called "Abkhazia".¹ As a rule, the main thing is that it was exclusively a Georgian state. This can only be denied by a lunatic but unfortunately, we come across such people nowadays as well.²

Katsia. Monuments of Architecture in the valley of Tskhuara. – In: *Materials on the Archaeology of Abkhazia*. Sukhumi, 1967 /in Russian/, dated back to the 9th-10th centuries (The *Corpus of Georgian Inscriptions*. Vol. II. Compiled by **V. Silogava**. Tbilisi, 1980, pp. 31-32; **V. Silogava**. The Georgian Epigraphy of Samegrelo-Abkhazia. Tbilisi, 2004, pp. 258-259, in Georgian; **L. Akhaladze**. Epigraphic Monuments of Abkhazia. – In: *Investigations in the History of Abkhazia/Georgia*. Tbilisi, 1999, p. 364 /in Russian/; **L. Akhaladze**. Abkhazian Epigraphy as Historical Source. V. I. *Lapidary and Mural Inscriptions*. Tbilisi, 2005, pp. 140-146, in Georgian.

¹ See in detail: **Z. Papaskiri**. Abkhazia: Unfalsified History. Second edition. Tbilisi, 2010, pp. 60-63 /in Russian/.

² In due time the Abkhaz public figure, S. Ashkhatsava, known for his separatist ideas, had a wild idea about the existence of the so-called Abkhaz National State even after the unification of Georgia in the 11th

One should not add Epifantsev in this category. He, at least, although indirectly, admits the existence both of a unified Georgian state and the All-Georgian Orthodox Christian Church, Abkhazia until the 16th century. This cannot be said about other ideologists of Abkhaz separatism and their Moscow associates who have completely lost their reason.¹ Furthermore, it is not correct to speak about the liquidation of the “autonomy of the Abkhazian

century. He seriously declared that the *“Abkhaz” kingdom i.e. the Abkhaz national state, had existed until the end of the 15th century when it disintegrated into three kingdoms: Kakheti, Kartli, and Imereti and into 5 principalities: Samtskhe-Saatabago, Guria, Samegrelo, Svaneti, and Abkhazia”* (S. Ashkhatsava. The Ways of Development of Abkhaz History. The publication of the Commissariat of Education of Abkhazia, 1925, p. 21 /in Russian/ [Emphasis added. – Z.P.].

¹ In connection with this, it is necessary especially to single out a well-known Abkhaz scholar and legal expert Taras Shamba and his ideological “brother”, a certain A. Neproshin, previously unknown ethnopolitical expert, candidate of sciences, a match for Ashkhatsava with his wild “admonitions.” Thus, by the assertion of these “scholars” the conjectures that Georgia has existed for twenty-six centuries have nothing to do with historic reality. **Before May, 1918 the State of Georgia and her territory had not existed! Only when several separate principalities, situated on the territory of Transcaucasia, none of which bore the name of “Georgia” united into a state this union was given this name, and juridically the appearance of this country became lawful, only from that moment and not earlier!** And this at a time when *“Abkhazia proper in the 8th to 11th centuries, and later till the 18th century was an independent state,”* which (from the 8th till the 13th century) *“encompassed practically the whole of Central and Western Transcaucasia, including all state formations, situated on this territory. References by Georgian politicians of the fact that all these territories belonged to Georgia in the 11th-13th centuries – is nonsense, for such a state had not existed until May 26, 1918”* (see: T. Shamba, A. Neproshin. The Post-Soviet Space after the Belovezha Events. Abkhazia – *De Facto and De Jure*. Citizen. The periodical political magazine, №2, 2004, in Russian) [emphasis added – Z.P.].

episcopacy” because the Catholicosate of “Abkhazeti” (not the Abkhaz autocephalous episcopacy) was not abolished in the unified Georgian monarchy in the 11th-15th centuries.¹ A national Christian Church of Abkhazia simply never existed. Despite the fantastic inventions of the sensation-lovers (like V. Kozhinov and others),² the Catholicosate of “Abkhazeti” was a West Georgian church organization, not just an Abkhaz national church.

In spite of his general incompetence in this field, A. Epifantsev nevertheless reveals some knowledge of the history of Georgia-Abkhazia. He declares that “the supremacy of the Georgian Orthodox Church ends at the beginning of the 16th c. when the Georgian state was in full disintegration and the Georgians disappeared as a nation from the territory of Abkhazia. Some were forced to leave Abkhazia; some were assimilated; their descendants considered themselves Adygs and Abkhazs; and some were sold as slaves.” This claim is partially close to the truth, but still needs commenting upon.

Yes, it is quite true that from the 16th century or rather, from the end of the 15th century, Georgia as a unified state, ceased to exist. Due to strengthened attacks by kindred Djiko-Abkhaz tribes of the North Caucasus and their expansion first within the borders of the Abkhazeti Saeristavo and then into the other territories of the present-day Abkhazia fundamental changes began to take

¹ In Georgian narrative and documentary sources, dealing with the events of the 11th-14th centuries, two Catholicosates are seen simultaneously. Here are meant Kartli (Eastern Georgian, Mtskheta) and “Abkhaz” (Western Georgian) Catholicosates. (See: **E. Gvenetadze**. On the Question of the “Two Catholicosates”. – *Historical Researches*, Annual of Abkhazian Organization of Ekvtime Takaishvili Georgian Historical Society. II. Tbilisi, 1999, pp. 72-76 /in Georgian/.

² **V. Kozhinov**. The Modern Life of Traditions. *Thoughts regarding Abkhaz Literature*. – *Friendship of Peoples*, №1, 1977, p. 256 /in Russian/.

place. From a highly developed feudal region where Christian culture and literacy flourished, Abkhazia gradually became a backward region with a primitive patriarchal economy and a reanimation of pagan beliefs.

The Adyg legend of the conquest of Abkhazia by Inal, the leader of the Adygs, and his comrades, the Abazine princes Ashe and Shashe in the first quarter of the 15th century¹ are the echo of real events, i.e. of large-scale migration of Abazin tribes, namely the highlander Abazin-Ashkharians from the North Caucasus to the Black Sea coast of Abkhazia”.² Sh. Inal-ipa, the eminent Abkhaz ethnographer, acknowledged that historic legends “*often tell of entire families, one after another, and of individuals coming to Abkhazia from the North after crossing the mountains*”.³ Embodying the order of the unified Georgian state in the region, the Sharvashidzes, Eristavis of Abkhazeti did not prevent the penetration of Djiko-Abkhazs (Apsuas) into the borders of the Abkhazeti saeristavo. On the contrary, they organized further expansion of these highlander tribes towards the southeast, using them in the fight against the rulers of Odishi-Samegrelo.

Initially, the rulers of Odishi-Samegrelo, who were still controlling the greater part of the present-day Abkhazia, staged periodic preemptive strikes against the Djiko-Abkhazs. Having

¹ See this in detail: **Sh. Nogmov**. History of the Adyg People. According to Kabardian’ Legends. Nalchik, 1982, pp. 76-78 /in Russian/; **D. Muskhelishvili**. The Historic Status of Abkhazia in the Georgian Statehood. – In: *Investigations in the History of Abkhazia/Georgia*. Tbilisi, 1999, p. 133 /in Russian/. By Ashe and Shashe the Abkhaz princes Achba and Chachba are meant. See: **L. Lavrov**. The Problems of the Caucasian Highlander Peoples’ Ethnogenesis. – In: *Historic-Ethnographic Essays of the Caucasus*. Leningrad, 1978, p. 46 /in Russian/.

² **D. Muskhelishvili**. The Historic Status of Abkhazia, p. 133.

³ **Sh. Inal-ipa**. Pages of the Historic Ethnography of Abkhazs. Sukhumi, 1971, p. 141 /in Russian/; **D. Muskhelishvili**. The Historic Status of Abkhazia, p. 133.

granted several villages with the noblemen and peasants (among them were the villages Aitarné, Arukha, and Rabitsa located in the close vicinity to Bichvinta) to the Holy Mother Virgin's Cathedral in Bichvinta (Pitsunda) during the period of his rule (1512-1533), in 1533 Prince Mamia III Dadiani of Samegrelo, together with Mamia I Gurieli and with the support of Bagrat III of Imereti (1510-1565), arranged a naval expedition in Djiketi. However, this campaign ended in the defeat of Dadiani and Gurieli. Mamia Dadiani was killed and Mamia Gurieli was taken prisoner.¹

In spite of the defeat, through the remainder of the 16th century a significant part of the territory of contemporary Abkhazia including Sokhumi, was considered to be the "Land of the Dadianis".² From the beginning of the 17th century, representatives of the house of Sharvashidze, the eristavis of Abkhazeti, gained an advantage through the weakening of Odishi-Samegrelo, taking vigorous measures to go beyond control from the Dadianis. It is considered that this period marked the end of the formation of an Abkhazian sovereign principality independent of Odishi-Samegrelo.

As documented by the Italian missionary, Giovanni da Lucca in 1630, the frontier between the domains of the Dadianis and

¹ **B. Khorava.** The Relations between Odishi and Abkhazia in the 15th-18th centuries. Tbilisi, 1996, pp. 61-62 /in Georgian/; **Z. Papaskiri.** The Ethno-Demographic, Political, State, Social and Cultural Aspects of Contemporary Abkhazia in the 16th-17th centuries – *Historical Researches*, Annual of Abkhazian Organization of Ekvtime Takaishvili Georgian Historical Society. Vol. X-XI, Tbilisi, 2008, pp. 70-71 (in Russian) See digital version: <http://sites.google.com/site/saistorio-dziebani/dziebani2007-2008/>, **Z. Papaskiri.** Abkhazia: Unfalsified History, pp. 80-81.

² *Turkish sources on the history of Samtskhe-Saatabago of the first half of the 16th century.* Turkish documents with a Georgian translation, research and commentary was published by **T. Abuladze.** Tbilisi, 1983, p. 57.

Sharvashidzes in this period encompassed the surroundings of Sokhumi-Skisornum along the River Abse, known today as the River Besletka.¹ One of the residences of the Odishi ruler remained Merkula (now in Ochamchire District), where Levan II Dadiani signed a peace treaty with the Ottoman Empire in 1615.² Later, in 1639 in Kiachi, not far from Merkula, Nestan-Daredjan, the wife of Levan Dadiani was buried with the funeral repast arranged in the palace of the ruler in Kvitouli, also in the Ochamchire district.³ Another palace of Levan II Dadiani was situated on the bank of the River Galidzga. At the request of Malakia II Gurieli, the Catholicos of “Abkhazeti,” this palace was donated to the Patriarch’s cathedral in Bichvinta (Pitsunda).⁴

In the early 17th century, Levan Dadiani (1611-1657) organized a military expedition into Abkhazia, reaching the River Kapoetistskali (R. Bzibi). He defeated detachments of Djiko-Abkhazs under the command of Marshania, establishing full control over the House of Sharvashidze for some time.⁵ However, the Abkhazs resumed ravaging incursions into the domains of the Odishi principality, causing Levan II Dadiani to build fortifications along

¹ *The Information of the Dominican Missionary Giovanni da Lucca regarding Abkhazia and Samegrelo*. – In: **I. Tabagua**. Georgia in the Archives and Book-Depositories of Europe. III. Tbilisi, 1987, p. 157 /in Georgian/; **B. Khorava**. The Relations, p. 94. **Z. Papaskiri**. Ethno-Demographic, Political, State, Social and, p. 73.

² **I. Tabagua**. Georgia in the Archives and Book-Depositories of Europe. vol. II. Tbilisi, 1986, p. 46 /in Georgian/; **B. Khorava**. The Relations, p. 72; **Z. Papaskiri**. Ethno-Demographic, Political, State, Social and Cultural Aspects, pp. 72-73.

³ **B. Khorava**. The Relations, p. 72; **Z. Papaskiri**. Ethno-Demographic, Political, State, Social, p. 73.

⁴ **B. Khorava**. The Relations, p. 149; **Z. Papaskiri**. Ethno-Demographic, Political, State, Social, p. 73.

⁵ **B. Khorava**. The Relations, p. 77; **Z. Papaskiri**. Ethno-Demographic, Political, State, Social, pp. 73-74.

the River Kelasuri known as the “Kelasuri Wall”.¹ In the latter half of the 17th century, the Abkhazs managed to break through the Kelasuri fortification, first moving the Odishi frontier to the banks of the Kodori and then occupying the territory between the Kodori and Enguri rivers too. By the beginning of the 18th century, the boundaries of present-day Abkhazia had been defined.

Having reached the banks of the River Enguri, the Abkhazs began mastering the territories south of the River Galidzga. According to a legend clearly representing historical realities, Kvapu Sharvashidze was granted the territory between the Galidzga and Enguri rivers. He settled several noble families from Bzibi Abkhazia on the territory between the named rivers. Among these were the Anchabadzes, the Emukhvaris, the Inal-ipa–Inalishvilis, the Marghancias, the Zvanbaias, the Lakirbayas, and the Akirtavas.² Kvapu himself started the branch of the Samurzakano Sharvashidzes. In Samurzakano, alongside the noble families just mentioned, a great number of peasant families were also moved.³

¹ Scholars acknowledge that the Kelasuri wall or, as Arcangelo Lamberti says, “*the sixty-thousand-steps-long wall to stop the incursions of Abkhazs*” (**Arcangelo Lamberti**. *A Description of Samegrelo*. **A. Chkonia’s** translation from Italian. 2nd edition. The preface, editing and commentary by **L. Asatiani**. Tbilisi, 1938, p. 116 /in Georgian/) was built in Levan II Dadiani’s time. This is corroborated by both Georgian (**Prince Vakhushti**. *Description of Georgian Kingdom. – Kartlis Tskhovreba (A History of Georgia)*, Vol. IV. The Georgian text prepared according to all the main manuscripts by **S. Kauhchishvili**. Tbilisi, 1973, p. 782 /in Georgian/; **N. Dadiani**. *The Life of Georgians*. The text was published, supplied with a preface, research, commentary, indices and glossary by **Sh. Burjanadze**. Tbilisi, 1962, p. 151 /in Georgian/ and foreign authors (**Arcangelo Lamberti**. *Description of Samegrelo*, p. 192. *Jean Chardin’s travels to Persia and Other Countries (Information about Georgia)*. Translation from French, research and commentary by **M. Mgaloblishvili**. Tbilisi, 1975, p. 107) written sources.

² **B. Khorava**. *The Relations*, pp. 116-117.

³ **B. Khorava**. *The Relations*, p. 117.

Of course, this significantly altered the ethnic and demographic composition of the region. However, this does not suggest by any means that Georgians, as a nation, have quite disappeared from the territory of present-day Abkhazia, as A. Epifantsev declares. With all assurance and in spite of conflicts, the overwhelming majority of the population on the territory between the Galidzga and Enguri rivers can be asserted to have been Georgians (Megrels), as before. As for other districts of contemporary Abkhazia, particularly the region between Tskhumi-Sokhumi and the River Ghalidzga, the indigenous Georgian population (primarily Megrelian) were obliged to leave their native places and move to the central districts of Odishi-Samegrelo. Many of them were taken prisoner and sold as slaves. In this instance, A. Epifantsev is correct. Others were moved and resettled in Bzibi Abkhazia where they were assimilated among the Abkhazs. There can be no doubt that the greater part of the Abkhazs living in the Gudauta district of contemporary Abkhazia and having Georgian (Megrel) surnames are the descendants of those Georgians, that is of Megrels forcibly driven to Bzibi Abkhazia.¹

What was the fate of the Christian Church in Abkhazia? Throughout this period, the jurisdiction of the Catholicosate of “Abkhazeti” (West Georgia) presided across the present-day Abkhazia, as before. However, by the second half of the 15th century,

¹ Of course, this does not exclude the habitation of the Kartvelian tribes, together with the Abkhazs, in the district of Gudauta-Bichvinta before this too. The same thing can be said about the Abkhazs with Georgian names, living in Ochamchire District, though there are quite a few of those among them who “have forgotten “about their Georgian (Megrelian) roots in the not so very distant past, under the pressure of nationalistically disposed Abkhaz Communist nomenclature who created in the autonomous republic a vividly-expressed Abkhaz conjuncture in the 1920s and at the beginning of the 1930s (also partially in the 1950s-1980s).

a lowering of the moral principles of Christianity became noticeable among the Abkhazs. As stated earlier, this stemmed from the new wave of movement of mountain Djiko-Abkhaz tribes from the North Caucasus. This is corroborated through the document "*Mtsnebai Sarjulo*," ("Canonical Regulations"), compiled in 1470-1474 in connection with the election of Iovakim as the Catholicos of "Abkhazeti", i.e. West Georgia.¹ This act was initiated by King Bagrat of Imereti (King of Kartli-Imereti), the great eristavt-eristavi Shamadavle Dadian-Gurieli, and the Patriarch Mikheil of Antioch (and not by the representatives of the Sharvashidze family who ruled the Abkhazeti Saeristavo) and it began the formation of the Catholicosate of "Abkhazeti" as an independent ecclesiastical unit.² In historiography, the establishment of an independent

¹ See the text of "*Mtsnebai Sarjulo*" in the book: *Georgian Legal Written Monuments*. Vol. III. Church Legislative Monuments (11th-19th centuries). The texts were published with commentary and indices by **I. Dolidze**. Tbilisi, 1966, pp. 231-233 /in Georgian/.

² This does not contradict the fact that the functioning of the so-called "Catholicosate of Abkhazeti" (Western Georgia), as already mentioned, began at the time of the "Leonids" rule in the kingdom of the "Abkhazs". In this connection, first of all attention was paid to Vakhushti Bagrationi's information regarding the following: the Western-Georgian church "with the assistance of Leon and his heirs freed itself from its dependence on the Greeks, for this is corroborated by the name of the one who calls himself the Catholicos of Abkhazeti, and not of Egrisi or Imereti" (**Prince Vakhushti**. The Description of the Kingdom of Georgia, p. 746; **M. Lordkipanidze**. The Appearance of New Feudal States, p. 287). In the 11th-12th centuries little is known about the "Catholicoses of Abkhazeti" and only in the 13th c. do they appear in the foreground in connection with David Narin's accession to the throne (Zhamtaaghmtsereli. – Kartlis Tskhovreba. The Georgian text was prepared according to all the main manuscripts by **S. Kaukhchishvili**. Vol. II. Tbilisi, 1959, p. 180; *Abkhazia and the Abkhazs of the Medieval Georgian Narrative sources*. The Georgian texts were translated into Russian, supplied with a preface and commentary by **G. Amichba**. Tbilisi, 1988, p. 103 /in Russian/).

“Catholicosate of Abkhazeti” in the second half of the 15th century correctly signified the victory of separatist aspirations of the rulers of Western Georgia. To satisfy their political ambitions, these rulers wanted to have their own Church, independent of the Mtskheta Catholicosate, which embodied an all-Georgian unity.¹

The national and cultural appearance of the so-called Catholicosate of “Abkhazeti” does not raise any doubts. As Z. Anchabadze, the prominent Abkhaz historian, indicates, the given church organization was Georgian wholly and entirely.² This is corroborated by narrative sources and documentary materials. Apart from the *Mtsnebai Sarjulo* (“Canonical Regulations”)³ these are the written monuments, describing the activities of the Catholicosate of “Abkhazeti”: “*The Great Yadgar, a collection of hymns and chants, of the Catholicosate of “Abkhazeti”,* also called “*Bichvinta Yadgar*”, created in the 16th-17th centuries⁴ and “*The Great Yadgar of the peasants of the Catholicosate of “Abkhazeti”,*” compiled by the order of Catholicos Malakia, and it fixes the peasants belonging to the Catholicos within the borders of Imereti, Guria, and Odishi.

¹ **Z. Papaskiri.** The Territory of Abkhazia in the 11th-15th centuries. – In: *Investigations in the History of Abkhazia/Georgia*. Tbilisi, 1999, pp. 199-200, in Russian/; see the same publication in the book: **Z. Papaskiri.** And Rose Georgia from Nikopsia to Daruband, pp. 83-84. For the detailed assessment of this event see: **I. Javakhishvili.** The History of the Georgian People. Vol. IV. Tbilisi, 1967, pp. 111-114 /in Georgian/.

² **Z. Anchabadze.** From the History of Medieval Abkhazia, p. 242.

³ By the way, apart from everything else, this document mentioned the borders of the area under the rule of “Catholicos of Abkhazeti”: Imereti, Guria, Odishi, Abkhazia, the whole of Achara, Shavsheti, and Klarjeti. See: *Georgian Legal Written Monuments*, vol. III, pp. 221-233.

⁴ The basis of the oldest part of this monument or the “Yadgar” itself, compiled at the edge of the 16th-17th centuries, was the “Yadgar” of Bagrat III, the well-known King of Imereti, donated by him to Bichvinta church between 1537 and 1565. As for the second part of this document, it is a collection of the deeds of the kings of Imereti, Catholicoses and princes of Western Georgia.

The existence of the residence of the Catholicos in Bichvinta (Pitsunda) on the territory of the Abkhazeti Saeristavo was the only connecting point of the Catholicosate of “Abkhazeti” with the ethnic Abkhaz society.¹ However, as the *Mtsnebai Sarjulo* indicates, the inhabitants of the Abkhazeti Saeristavo, “deviated from Christianity and abandoned the commandments of Christ”.² Consequently, this caused the Catholicoses of Abkhazeti to leave the Bichvinta residence and move to Gelati near Kutaisi, the capital city of the kings of Imereti.³ According to the words of Arcangelo

¹ The advancement of Bichvinta as a general central Georgian religious centre, in Z. Anchabadze’s opinion, took place in the period of the strengthening of the principality of Sabediano (i.e. Samegrelo – **Z.P.**). As the scholar says “already at the end of the 13th century “Bichvinta” became a religious centre of the whole of the Western Caucasus” (**Z. Anchabadze**. From the History of Medieval Abkhazia, p. 241). The researchers consider as the evidence of this fact that the Alan and Zikh Metropolises were joined to Bichvinta metropolis at that time (**Z. Anchabadze**. From the History of Medieval Abkhazia, p. 241; **V. Kiknadze**. Georgia in the 14th century. Tbilisi, 1989, p. 102 /in Georgian/).

² *Georgian Legal Written Monuments*, vol. III, p. 222; **D. Muskhelishvili**. The Historic Status of Abkhazia, p.134.

³ There is no common opinion regarding as to when the decision of moving the residence of the “Catholicoses of Abkhazeti” from Bichvinta to Gelati was made. In Z. Anchabadze’s opinion, it happened in the middle of the 17th century, in the time of Catholicos Zacharia Kvariani (**Z. Anchabadze**. From the History of Medieval Abkhazia., p. 278). As for other researchers, they date this fact back to the middle of the 16th century, in the time of Catholicos Evdemon Chkhetidze – 1558-1578 (**B. Lominadze**. Gelati. Tbilisi, 1958, p. 12 /in Georgian/. See also: *The Georgian Soviet Encyclopedia*. vol. II. Tbilisi, 1977, p. 31 /in Georgian/. Irrespective of the fact when it happened, in the 16th or the 17th c., one thing is obvious: it was caused by a significantly worsened situation on the territory of contemporary Abkhazia. However, as it turned out, Bichvinta remained a significant centre of the Western Georgian church after this too. Here the sanctifying of Mirrh and other rites took place (**D. Bakradze**. The Caucasus in the Old Monuments of Christianity. Sankt Peterburg, 1875, pp. 121-122 /in Russian/; **Z. Anchabadze**. From the History, pp. 242, 278).

Lamberti, the catholic missionary, who lived in Western Georgia during the 17th century, the Abkhazs, like the Alans, Circassians, Djiks, and Karachaians were Christians only in word. In reality, by their faith and action, they were far from being Christians.¹ Giovanni da Lucca, another missionary, remarked similarly: “though Christian, the Abkhazs do not observe Christian rites.” He also emphasized that the Abkhazs lived in the mountains before Circassia. There are no towns in their country and their way of life is similar to that of the Circassians.² Johann von Güldenstädt noticed in the 18th century that “the Abkhaz way of life resembles that of the Circassians more than any other people and they primarily engage in breeding cattle”.³ Arcangelo Lamberti⁴ and Vakhushti Bagrationi⁵ wrote of the closeness of the Abkhazs to the North Caucasian mountain peoples, such as the Alans and the Djiks.

Still, one cannot assert that the Abkhazs, especially representatives of the political elite, departed from the all-Georgian Christian world. This is corroborated by Georgian language inscriptions and colophons, created at the instruction of representatives of the House of Sharvashidze. One colophon in the Bichvinta Gospel from the 17th century, announces that Solomon Sharvashidze and his son, Arzakan, helped the king (of Imereti – **Z.P.**) and Dadiani against Liparit Dadiani and Gurieli. In honour of this event, the Gospel was bound with silver for the health and glory of

¹ **Arcangelo Lamberti**. Description of Samegrelo, p. 116; **B. Khorava**. The Relations, p. 83.

² *The Information of the Dominican Missionary Giovanni da Lucca regarding Abkhazia and Samegrelo*, p. 170.

³ *Güldenstädt's Travels in Georgia*. Vol. II. The German text with a Georgian translation was published and studied by **G. Gelashvili**. Tbilisi, 1964, p. 51. **B. Khorava**. The Relations, p. 85; **Z. Papaskiri**. On the Question of the Christian Mentality of the Abkhazs. – In Book: “*Teimuraz Mibchvani – 70.*” Tbilisi, 2008-2010, p. 318 /in Georgian/.

⁴ **Arcangelo Lamberti**. Description of Samegrelo, p. 8.

⁵ **Vakhushti**. The Description of Kingdom of Georgia, p. 787.

Solomon and his son, Arzakan.¹ There is also a silver item bearing Georgian inscription donated to the Lykhni church by Solomon Sharvashidze² and another colophon in the Bichvinta Gospel made under the instruction of Soustan (Bagrat) Sharvashidze.³

No less important are the Books of Oaths of Kvapu Sharvashidze and other representatives of the Abkhaz sovereign House of Sharvashidze, written in Georgian and addressed to the Catholicoses of “Abkhazeti” Grigol Lordkipanidze and Davit Nemsadze. In spite of a departure from a genuine Christian way of life, the Books of Oaths testify that the Abkhaz princes still considered the Catholicoses of “Abkhazeti” to be their spiritual fathers and considered it their duty to faithfully serve the Holy Throne, which was now situated not in Bichvinta, Abkhazia but far from it in Gelati.⁴ The Catholicoses of “Abkhazeti” considered the present-day Abkhazia to be their flock and took care of the repose of the souls of its princes. This was particularly evident in 1704 after the death of Kvapu Sharvashidze. Grigol Lordkipanidze, the Catholicos of “Abkhazeti”, arrived promptly at the Sharvashidze residence, served at the funeral service and received the gratuity from the family of the deceased intended for such occasions.⁵

Although in the 16th-18th centuries, the Abkhazs rejected the commandments of Christ and ravaged some Christian sanctuaries

¹ **Z. Papaskiri.** Abkhazia: Unfalsified History, pp. 83-84.

² **Z. Papaskiri.** Abkhazia: Unfalsified History, p. 84. By the way scholars, paying attention to a reserved and respectful mention of the king in the postscript of Solomon Sharvashidze, quite validly observe that at this time the Abkhaz sovereigns really considered the Imereti king to be their suzerain (see in detail: **Z. Anchabadze.** From the History, p. 289; **B. Khorava.** The Relations, p. 100).

³ **Z. Papaskiri.** Abkhazia: Unfalsified History, p. 85.

⁴ **Z. Papaskiri.** Abkhazia: Unfalsified History, p. 88.

⁵ *Georgian Legal Written Monuments*, vol. III, p. 670; **B. Khorava.** The Relations, p. 122.

(the eparchies of Dranda, Mokvi and Bedia ceased to function), they still preserved a certain fear of God at heart¹ and continued to worship to an extent at Ilori (Elir-nikh), Kiachi (Kiach-nikh), Likhni (Likh-nikh), Bichvinta, and Lashkendari churches.² In the middle of the 18th century, the authorities of the Osman Empire began the final conquest of Abkhazia and Djiketi. Manuchar Sharvashidze was overthrown. He and his younger brothers, Zurab and Shirvani, were taken to Turkey and forced to adopt Islam.³ Consequently, the Abkhazs welcomed Zurab Sharvashidze with great honour as he returned to Abkhazia as the Bey of Sukhumi. After christening him in the Ilori Church, they declared him their sovereign prince.⁴ The Abkhazs perceived the christening of the prince

¹ In this connection, it is notable the fact how an Abkhaz representative of a higher layer of society visited the ship, by which Jean Chardin (1643-1713; was in Western Georgia at the beginning of the 1670s) was travelling. He, with a small suite, met Jean Chardin on his arrival and among other things offered the silver frame of an icon. On being questioned by the French traveler as to where the icon was, the Abkhaz noblemen answered that it was in the church, and they were afraid of punishment, had they dared to touch it. See: *Travels of Jean Chardin to Persia and Other Countries (Information about Georgia)*. Translation from French, research and commentary by **M. Mgaloblishvili**. Tbilisi, 1975, p. 212; **J. Gamakharia**. Abkhazia and Orthodox Christianity, p. 260; **Z. Papaskiri**. On the Question of the Christian Mentality of the Abkhazs, p. 318.

² **G. Chursin**. Materials on the Ethnography of Abkhazia. Sukhumi, 1956, pp. 27-36; **Sh. Inal-ipa**. The Abkhazs (Historic-ethnographical Essays). Sukhumi, 1965, p. 327; **B. Khorava**. The Relations, p. 138; **Z. Papaskiri**. Abkhazia: Unfalsified History, p. 92; **Z. Papaskiri**. On the Questions of the Christian Mentality of the Abkhazs, p. 318.

³ **Ir. Antelava**. Essays on the History of Abkhazia of the 17th – 18th cc. Sukhumi, 1951, pp. 75-76; **B. Khorava**. The Relations, p. 131; **Z. Papaskiri**. Abkhazia: Unfalsified History, p. 92; **Z. Papaskiri**. On the Question of the Christian Mentality, p. 138.

⁴ **K. Machavariani**. A Descriptive Guide-Book of the City of Sukhumi and the Sukhumi District with an Historic and Ethnographic Essay on Abkhazia. Sukhumi, 1913, pp. 361-362; **B. Khorava**. The Relations, p. 131.

as a type of demonstration of the political sovereignty of the Abkhazian principality from the “Sublime Porte.”

Given the foregoing history, it is difficult to accept Epifantsev’s assertion that “from the 16th century Islam had become the main religion of Abkhazia with vividly expressed elements of heathenism.” The demonstrative christening of Zurab Sharvashidze provides compelling evidence that even in the second half of the 18th century during a decisive stage of the Islamization of Abkhazia it appears evident that the Abkhazs perceived the transition with difficulty, officially still considering themselves to be Christians. In this respect, the question presented by Epifantsev is extremely symptomatic. It is the question of Turkish travelers, noticing half-destroyed churches and crosses on the mountains, who asked the Abkhazs: “*You are Muslims, aren’t you? Why don’t you destroy them?*” The Abkhazs would answer, saying “*We won’t. It is the faith of our fathers.*” Meanwhile, the “vividly expressed elements of heathenism” of the religious mentality of the Abkhaz of the late Middle Ages was not the result of the Turkish dominance. It was caused by the demographic expansion of a new wave of Djiko-Abkhaz tribes exhibiting the moral principles of a primitive communal society within a territory once-flourishing as a Christian region.

From the point of view of church relations, this represents the historic reality of the situation in Abkhazia from the 16th to the 18th centuries. In spite of some alienation, Abkhazia and the Abkhazs – a significant part of the feudal aristocracy, to be sure still remained in communion with the rest of the Georgian Orthodox Church and, as an organization, were under the jurisdiction of the Catholicosate of “Abkhazeti.” All this is explained by the fact that the Djiko-Abkhaz (Apsua) expansion in the south-eastern direction, organized by the Abkhaz House of the Sharvashidzes, and their forcing them to stay on territories, belonging earlier to the owners of Odishi-Samegrelo, in spite of definite peculiarities, did

not exceed the limits of intestine feudal wars. Representatives of the family of the Sharvashidzes, expanding the boundaries of their domains at the expense of the territories of the neighbouring Odishi principality did not aspire to create an Apsua-Abkhaz national state that had nothing to do with the Georgian state and political system, but they tried, as well as the Dadianis of Samegrelo and Gurielis of Guria, to move out to leading positions inside the Georgian state and political space.

The eristavi House of Sharvashidze of Abkhazeti did not see itself outside of the Georgian state, cultural or political world. At the first opportune moment, they did not lose the chance to ascend the throne of Odishi Principal or king of Imereti. In the latter half of the 17th century, Sorekh Sharvashidze was the first who attempted to declare himself, though unsuccessfully, the sovereign prince of Odishi.¹ Kvapu Sharvashidze also consolidated his position on the right bank of the River Enguri, occupying Rukhi where he died in 1704.² The fact that many representatives of the sovereign House of Sharvashidze, even those who had adopted Islam (Rostom, Manuchar, Zurab, etc.), had Georgian names underscores the vitality of connections with the common Georgian social and cultural space. We come across Georgian names even among Sadzis and Ubikhs. Levan Tsanubaya,³ (bearing the Georgian-Megrelian form of the surname Tsanba), and the Ubikh prince Zurab Khamish⁴ were both significant political figures in the first half of the 19th century.

¹ **B. Khorava.** *The Relations*, p. 114; **Z. Papaskiri.** *Abkhazia: Unfalsified History*, p. 85.

² **B. Khorava.** *The Relations*, p. 121; **Z. Papaskiri.** *Abkhazia: Unfalsified History*, p. 90.

³ *Acts, collected by the Caucasian Archaeographic Commission* (further: *ACAC*). Ed. **A. Berge.** Vol. IV. Tiflis, 1870, pp. 426, 429, 953 /In Russian/.

⁴ *ACAC*. Vol. X, part. I. Ed. **A. Berge.** Tiflis, 1884, p. 505 /In Russian/.

Vivid evidence that the sovereign House of Sharvashidze belonged to the common Georgian political state and cultural world are the correspondences of Kvapu Sharvashidze, of Kelesh-Bey Sharvashidze and of his successors, Giorgi (Safar-Bey) and Mikheil Sharvashidze. Both official and informal letters were written exclusively in the Georgian language. During the time of Mikheil Sharvashidze in the 19th century, even the representatives of the Tsar's administration in the Caucasus acknowledged that "Georgian was the written language used by the family of the Princes Sharvashidze".¹ The common Georgian national, cultural and political mentality of the sovereign House of Sharvashidze was demonstrated most significantly while compiling the "Pleading Articles" sent by the sovereign Prince Giorgi Sharvashidze (Safar-Bey) to Emperor Alexander I to receive the principality of Abkhazeti under the protection of the Russian Empire.² By drafting the

¹ **Sh. Chkhetia**. On the History of the Abkhaz Principality. – In: *"Historical Herald"*, №15-16, 1963, p. 154; **Z. Papaskiri**. Abkhazia: Unfalsified History, p. 122. Fragments of the official correspondence and the epistolary inheritance of the mentioned representatives of the Abkhaz sovereign House of the Sharvashidzes see in: **Z. Papaskiri**. Essays from the History of Contemporary Abkhazia. p. I. From Ancient Times to 1917. Tbilisi, 2004, pp. 105-108, 120, 122, 126-127, 129-130, 166-170, 186 /in Georgian/, digital version see at: <https://sites.google.com/site/zpapaskiri/publications-georgian>; **Z. Papaskiri**. Abkhazia: Unfalsified History, pp. 88, 89, 96, 98, 101, 102, 120, 124, 128, 138.

² The Georgian text see in: newspaper *"Sakhalkho Ganatleba"*, 31 May, 1989. **Z. Papaskiri**. Essays on the History of Contemporary Abkhazia, pp. 126-128. As G. Paichadze, the known Georgian historian has discovered, *"the text of this document, was compiled according to the form, worked out by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs... taking into consideration specific local conditions, then it was translated into the Georgian language and registered officially as the original, i.e. is signed and certified with Giorgi's seal, and also by Abkhaz princes, and by adding to it the Russian text, is presented as an official document"*. See: **G. Paichadze**. **G. Paichadze**. Abkhazia as Part of the Russian

document in the Georgian language, the ruler of Abkhazeti sent a distinct message to the Russian party and to the world at large that in international relations, the principality of Abkhazeti presented a Georgian national, cultural, and political worldview.¹

Finally, the most significant proof that the sovereign House of Abkhazeti considered themselves to be an indivisible part of the common Georgian Christian world rests with the last sovereign prince of Abkhazia, Mikheil Sharvashidze, who was buried in Mokvi church. The epitaph on his tombstone was carved in Old Georgian Asomtavruli script. Following the abolition of the principality of Abkhazeti in 1864, the representatives of the Sharvashidze family considered themselves as a part of the common Georgian national, cultural, and political world. In this respect, Alexander Sharvashidze's declaration, "***I am not an Abkhaz prince, I am a Georgian prince***",² is especially noteworthy.

This is the truth that Mr. Epifantsev does not want to accept. It is not fortuitous that he never mentioned the existence of the Catholicosate of "Abkhazeti". It is easy to understand that if he began to speak about the so-called Catholicosate of "Abkhazeti", he would also have to state the fact that the Russian authorities abolished the "independent Abkhaz national church" in 1814. Here it is not even important that this so-called "Abkhaz church" was, as it has already been said many times, a Georgian church and not really an Abkhaz national church. The main point is that the Russian Empire, against all church canons, abolished the independent Apostolic church (both Eastern-Georgian and Western-Georgian). This was clearly shown in due time, i.e. in 1919, by his Holiness

Empire (1810-1917). – *Investigations in the History of Abkhazia/Georgia*. Tbilisi, 1999, p. 217 /in Russian/ [Emphasis added – **Z.P.**].

¹ **G. Paichadze**. Abkhazia as Part of the Russian Empire, p. 217.

² **N. Berdzenishvili**. Questions concerning the History of Georgia. vol. VIII. Tbilisi, 1990 /in Georgian), p. 611 [Emphasis added – **Z.P.**].

Leonid, Catholicos-Patriarch of all Georgia in a special epistle to Tikhon, the Patriarch of Moscow and all Russia.¹ What can be done with this truth? In this case, it will be hurt the national self-esteem of today's Abkhaz clergy, first of all, of Archpriest B. Aplia (not long ago his last name was spelled as Pilia, in Georgian way), who, breaking all the church canons, proclaimed himself head of the "independent Abkhaz church." This clergyman aspires to convince his compatriots, who have gone astray, that the Catholicosate of "Abkhazeti" belongs to the non-existent Abkhaz-Apsua Christian world.

Here follows A. Epifantsev's quite incomprehensible reservation about not discussing the details of ***"the abolition of the autocephaly of the Georgian church – for it is a subject of an independent and comprehensive research, connected not so much and not only with Georgia and the Caucasus, but with the Russian church itself, with the principle of unification, etc."*** (emphasis added – Z.P.) It must be understood as follows: *"the abolition of the autocephaly of the Georgian church"* is an internal business of the Russian church and it is connected with the "principle of unification". This is how simply and insolently our "profound thinker and expert" of the church history of Georgia-Abkhazia avoided answering this pivotal argument.

¹ *The Epistle of His Holiness Leonid, Catholicos Patriarch of All Georgia to His Holiness Tikhon, Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia*. Tiflis: Printing-house "Sorapan", 1920 (online version see at: <http://orthodoxy.org.ua/ru/2007/10/01/10297.html>). As it is known, the given "Epistle" of the head of the Georgian church is the answer to the unfounded assertion of the ROCCh about the illegality of the restoration in the spring of 1917 of the autocephaly of the Georgian Orthodox Christian Church, and then, in September of 1917, the election of his Holiness Kirion Catholicos-Patriarch of all Georgia. See the Decree of Patriarch Tikhon №3 of October 29, 1917 on the question of Georgia's autocephaly. – Online version see at: <http://Georgia.Orthodoxy.ru/index...php?cat-history&ii=oDi.i.-9>.

A. Epifantsev is again wrong when says that “*On the very next occasion* (i.e., after the 15th c. when, according to his words, “the Georgian state fully disintegrated, and the Georgians themselves in Abkhazia disappeared as a nation”) *the Abkhaz church fell under the influence of the Georgian Orthodox Church in 1918*” (emphasis added – Z.P.). In this respect, we must remind the champion for the “independent Abkhaz church” that even the most imperially disposed public figures of Tsarist Russia (whether secular or ecclesiastical), in spite of certain attempts, were unable to separate Abkhazia from the rest of Georgia on the question of the church and Abkhazia, as it is known, before the restoration of the autocephaly of the Georgian Orthodox Christian Church in 1917, remained under the jurisdiction of the Georgian Exarchate. And, in this case, it is not so important that the Georgian Exarchate was not a sovereign Georgian church organization and was only an administrative structure of the Russian Orthodox Christian Church, the main point is that even the authorities of the Synod and the government of the Russian empire did not doubt (at least till the end of the 19th c.) that Abkhazia belonged to the Georgian Christian world and therefore found it natural for it to be included into the Georgian Exarchate.

It should be noted that such an approach logically proceeded from the general policy of the Russian empire with respect to Georgia. In this respect, it will not be too much for our inquisitive “expert” on the questions of Russia’s policy in the Caucasus to learn that at the beginning of the 19th century, when Abkhazia was received under the patronage of the Russian empire, official representatives of Russia’s high authorities in the Caucasus considered it to be part of the common Georgian political and state organism and by this, they substantiated the necessity of including Abkhazia, together with the other Georgian units, into the Russian empire. A vivid proof of this can be the report of General Pavel Tsitisianov to

Count A. Vorontsov in Saint-Petersburg on October 27, 1803: *“Meanwhile, I think it my duty to touch upon the history of this Kelesh-bek (i.e. Kelesh-bey Sharvashidze – Z.P.) His domain in the 15th century, namely in 1414 A.D. when Iveria was not divided, he, Kelesh-bek, was known as Sharvashidze: his domain was one of the provinces of Iveria”*.¹

That the sovereign House of Abkhazeti belonged to the Georgian Christian world was emphasized by General Gudovich, another vice-regent of Georgia in his letter to Count Saltikov on March 3, 1809. *“For ages, the sovereign princes of Abkhazia have been descended from the family of the Sharvashidzes and their ancestors were Christian, but Sefer-Ali-bek’s grandfather, freeing himself from dependence on Imereti and falling under the influence of the Ottoman Porta, along with it adopted the Mohammedan law”*.²

That is why Abkhazia, together with the other Georgian regions, found itself in the united administrative space at that time, both in state-political and church relations. Of course, after a certain time when Abkhazia was finally conquered by the Russian empire (i.e. in the 1860s-1870s) the question of penetration of the “Russian citizenship” into Abkhazia arose. They tried to achieve this aim by “colonizing the region with a Russian population”. But the government did not limit itself to these measures. As one of the Russian officials of high rank in the Caucasian administration said, the authorities were to take care of the preparation of necessary conditions for the complete merging of the Abkhazs with the population of the Russian empire”.³ For this, it was necessary to

¹ ACAC. Vol. II. Ed. **A. Berge**. Tiflis, 1868, p. 463 /in Russian/ [Emphasis added – Z.P.].

² ACAC. Vol. III. Ed. **A. Berge**. Tiflis, 1869, pp. 208-209 /in Russian/ [Emphasis added – Z.P.].

³ **A. Silagadze, V. Guruli**. The Georgian Party of Tedo Sakhokia in Abkhazia. – In book: **A. Silagadze, V. Guruli**. Historical and Political Essays. Tbilisi, 2002, p. 325 /in Georgian/.

tear out the Abkhazs from the common Georgian historical and cultural organism. It would be impossible without ousting Georgian literacy. The authorities understood very well that the main obstacle to the russification of the region was the Georgian clergy in whose hands still were such important spheres of influence as the church and school.⁴ This circumstance was viewed by official persons of Russia as an “evil” which “was to be annihilated and torn out by its roots once and for all”.⁵

And it was just then that the authorities of the empire started to take steps to alienate the Abkhaz population from the Georgian cultural space. So, by the decree of the synodal office of Georgia-Imereti of March 17, 1898 it was “*forbidden to teach the Georgian language in the schools of Abkhazia and Samurzakano*”.⁶ By special order, surveillance of the “*eparchial and administrative authorities was established to keep strictly... orders concerning the divine service and the school teaching*”.⁷ All these and other measures, according to the admission of the authorities themselves, namely of General F. K. Gerschelman, the military governor of Kutaisi Guberniya, in the first place were particularly directed towards the following: “to safeguard the Abkhazs against Georgian influence” and to ensure in future the merging of the “native population with Russians”.⁸ “The only measure” proposed was to take “*the church and school out of the hands of the Georgian clergy*”, and to appoint Russian and, if possible, Abkhaz priests “*in the Sukhumi eparchy in the parishes with the Abkhaz and Samurzakanoan population parishes*”.⁹

⁴ *The Report of the Kutaisi Military Governor on the People’s Military Management*, September 2, 1900. – In book: **A. Silagadze, V. Guruli**. *Historical and Political Essays*. Tbilisi, 2002, p. 312.

⁵ *The Report of the Kutaisi Military Governor*, p. 312.

⁶ *The Report of the Kutaisi Military Governor*, p. 312.

⁷ *The Report of the Kutaisi Military Governor*, p. 312.

⁸ *The Report of the Kutaisi Military Governor*, p. 313.

⁹ *The Report of the Kutaisi Military Governor*, pp. 312-313.

As the already mentioned military governor of Kutaisi Guberniya Gen. Gerschelman has written in his report, *“On condition of appointing Russian priests in the Sukhumi Region, the church schools can be safely developed and will be a serious help for raising the intellectual level of the population...”*.¹⁰ In the same report General Gerschelman, in his appeal that *“the Sukhumi population of the Sukhumi Region should be safeguarded from Georgian influence,”* pointed out: *“the measures offered will reverse the situation towards the state interests and will stop forever the efforts of Georgia to Georgianize the Sukhumi Region”*.¹¹

However, the steps taken in the sphere of church policy seemed insufficient to the Russian authorities, and they thought it necessary to tear Abkhazia out of the common Georgian Christian organism. It was on this issue that the Vicegerent of the Caucasus Prince Golitsin and the Exarch of Georgia Alexei wrote to the Chief Procurator of the Synod in 1902: *“It is desirable to tear the **Sukhumi Eparchy away from the extremely undesirable Georgian influence. It would be very good to join the Sukhumi Eparchy to Kuban for this purpose. In the Kuban Region there is a purely Russian population of 1,716,245. The one-hundred-thousand-strong population of the Black Sea coast, which speaks many languages, will easily dissolve in this mass**”*.¹²

In spite of such endeavours of the Russian colonial authorities, their attempts to take the Sukhumi Eparchy out of the Georgian Exarchate failed. And it was not only due to the merit of distinguished Georgian public figures of those times, vigorously protesting against the realizing of the imperial plans of the tsar’s officials, but also due to the best sons of the Abkhaz people who

¹⁰ *The Report of the Kutaisi Military Governor*, p. 313.

¹¹ *The Report of the Kutaisi Military Governor*, p. 313.

¹² **J. Gamakharia, B. Gogia.** *Abkhazia – the Historic Province of Georgia.* Tbilisi, 1997, pp. 66-67 [Emphasis added – **Z.P.**].

understood the intentions of the Russian empire. Vivid evidence of this is the arrival of the so-called “Abkhaz deputation” in Tbilisi and their talks with the viceroy in the Caucasus, Grand Duke Nikolai Nikolaevich on April 6, 1916. The head of the delegation was Prince Alexander Sharvashidze, the recognized leader of the Abkhaz political establishment of those days. Besides him, the delegation consisted of the following members: Princes Dimitri Marshania, Astamur Inal-ipa, Giorgi Sharvashidze, Pétré Anchabadze, and the peasants Anton Chukbar and Ezukhbaya. The “Abkhaz deputation” presented a special petition to the viceroy of the Caucasus. It stated: *“For ages, before we were joined to Russia, Christianity in Abkhazia had been spread by the Georgian clergy and the Georgian and Abkhazian Church held all in common: the Abkhazian Church was under the protectorate of the ruling princes and the people of Abkhazia. The Georgian clergy had great authority in Abkhazia and revealed surprising ability and endurance in spreading Christianity in all those districts where for some reason and on account of obstacles, it did not find followers. **Then after Georgia and Abkhazia joined Russia and the independent Georgian church was abolished and subjected to the Synod, the cause of spreading Christianity and its popularization became extremely difficult; even the oldest Christians in some districts of Abkhazia became Muslims. One should look for the reason for this deplorable phenomenon in the permanent separation from one another of people and preachers of Christianity who tried to spread it in the language that the population did not understand. From the second half of the 19th century, divine service in the churches of Abkhazia was conducted in the Slav language that the people did not understand. The direct connection between the people and the clergy ceased. This brought our church to today’s regrettable condition. Now rumours are spread that the synod plans to separate the Sukhumi Eparchy from the Georgian Exarchate;***

this will put an end for good to the aims of the church to restore Christianity in Abkhazia. There must be no place for politics in the questions of religion... For these reasons and with a view of defending the interests of religion, we ask you not to detach and not to separate the Sukhumi Eparchy from the structures, existing from past centuries, that were created for the historic and cultural life of Georgia and Abkhazia”¹

What else can be said? It is difficult to imagine better proof of the fact of how strong the bonds of the historic and cultural unity of Abkhazia with the rest of Georgia were at the beginning of the 20th century. The main aim of the imperial circles of Russia was the destruction of this unity and the final Russification of the Abkhazs.

Thus, in our opinion, the material, cited by us, clearly shows the falsehood of the demagogic accusations of Mr. Epifantsev, addressed to the hierarchs of the Georgian church and its head, as if they broke off the church canons as early as 1917. If anyone broke off these canons it was, first of all, the Russian empire, as it has already been mentioned, that had forcibly abolished the autocephaly of the Apostolic Georgian Orthodox Christian church which had a much older history than the Russian church itself. In this connection, we will recall the words of Giorgi Sharvashidze, one of the best representatives of the Abkhaz people, a prominent public figure of Georgia, a writer and a publicist, the heir of Mikheil Sharvashidze, the last ruler of Abkhazia: ***“Georgians are knights, participating in crusades, advocates of the original Christianity, they stood at the gates of the Caucasus for fifteen centuries not because they wanted to invade foreign countries or plunder other people’s property, they stood there to defend their fatherland, to protect their Christian culture and their citizens’ lives...”***²

¹ **J. Gamakharia, B. Gogia.** Abkhazia – the Historic Province of Georgia, pp. 385-386 [Emphasis added – **Z.P.**].

² **S. Lekishvili.** Giorgi Sharvashidze. Documentary Materials. – In:

Yes, the Georgians, the Georgian church never invaded foreign countries, and did not take a flock away from anybody. Abkhazia with its indigenous Georgian (whether Mr. Epifantsev and provocateurs of his kind want it or not, the Georgians are the indigenous population of Abkhazia not to a lesser extent than the Abkhazs) and the Abkhaz population (let alone the so-called “South Ossetia”) has always been an organic part of the common Georgian ethnical, cultural, political, and state space. Therefore, his Holiness and Beatitude Catholicos-Patriarch of all Georgia Ilia II, the present head of the Apostolic Georgian Orthodox Christian Church, worthily does his sacred duty and faithfully stands on guard defending the unity of the flock, entrusted to him, and of his fatherland. And vain are the efforts of our advocate of the “independence” of the “Abkhaz church” to accuse the spiritual leader of Georgia of a preconceived attitude towards the representatives of the non-Georgian population. It is neither more nor less than a sacrilegious accusation, having no foundation whatsoever. It is directed to the inciting of anti-Georgian sentiments among our Abkhaz and Ossetian brothers. In connection with this, we think it necessary to enlighten our “Know-all expert”; his Holiness and Beatitude has never singled out Georgians or has spoken about erecting a monument to all the Georgians, killed in the conflicts between nations.” On the contrary, he prays every day for the repose of the souls of those who were killed in fratricidal skirmishes irrespective of their nationality and religion. Does the initiative of creating a memorial, on which the names of all, not only of Georgians, killed in fratricidal conflicts from both sides of the sons and daughters of our fatherland, will be carved, not belong to the Catholicos-Patriarch of all Georgia? This is known to the whole world. Why invent lies? As for the indignation of our “devoted advocate” of

“Historical Herald”, №31-32. Tbilisi, 1975, pp. 285-286 /in Russian/
[Emphasis added – Z.P.].

common Christian principles about the declaration of the Catholicos-Patriarch of all Georgia, concerning the fact “that it is indeed Georgian blood that is shed on Georgian land, it is the Georgians that have to defend themselves from the people (the so-called “South Ossetians” are meant – **Z.P.**) whom Georgia saved, received as refugees and who instead of being grateful have claims on our territory and threaten to separate it from Georgia,” here also, both from the political point of view or from the question of Christian morality, let alone the historical justice, everything is in its place.

Despite the false assertions of Mr. Epifantsev, his Holiness and Beatitude the Catholicos-Patriarch of all Georgia always met with tolerance the attacks and various non-canonic actions in regard to the Georgian church on the part of its stray sons. It is seen even from the fact that he up to this time he shows, it can be said, superfluous tolerance and does not take decisive steps against the priest Bessarion Apla, the so-called “Manager of the Eparchial Boards of the Sukhumi-Abkhazian Eparchy”. Incidentally, nobody else but the professor of Moscow Theological Academy, Protodeacon Andrey Kuraev, assessing the given fact, remarks quite correctly that ***“the position of the Georgian church during the previous 20 years was very worthy and tolerant in its own way: they did not seem to notice the real independence of the Abkhaz church. The Georgian patriarch did not receive any canonic sanctions, did not unfrock anybody and did not demand anything of them”***.¹ Whom shall we believe? To the recognized authority of ROCCh or a brazen-faced intriguer? We think that the answer is clear. Fortunately, the highest authority of the spiritual pastor of Georgia does not depend (even among the imperially inclined circles of Russia), on liars and provocateurs like A. Epifantsev.

¹ *A representative of the Russian Orthodox Church Offers to give the Abkhaz Eparchy temporarily to ROCCh.* <http://www.newsru.com/religy/16sep2009/kuraev2.html> [Emphasis added – **Z.P.**].

In this respect, the assessment of the activities of his Excellence and the Beatitude by D. Medvedev, then President of Russia, in his congratulatory address on the occasion of the 31st anniversary (at the end of 2008) of the enthronement of Ilia II, the Catholicos-Patriarch of all Georgia, is very noteworthy. “All Your life,” pointed out the official leader of the Russian Federation, one of the instigators of the August invasion of Georgia in 2008, “*is connected with the Orthodox Christian church of Georgia, one of the oldest Orthodox Christian churches in the world. And already for more than thirty years, you have been its head, the Catholicos-Patriarch of all Georgia. The time of your service is marked by a strengthening Orthodox Christianity, a real flourishing of the Georgian Orthodox Christian Church that has been expressed by its high authority both inside the country and in an international religious society. You have become the real spiritual leader of the Georgian people*”.¹

As is generally said, no comment is needed!

¹ *Medvedev congratulated Ilia II on the anniversary of his enthronization.*
http://old.newsgeorgia.ru/official_statement/20081235/151076060.html [Emphasis added – **Z.P.**].

**ANOTHER LOOK AT ONE OF THE FALSE
HISTORICAL POSTULATES
OF THE ABKHAZ SEPARATIST IDEOLOGY**
*On the Question of Abkhazia's Political and
Legal Status in 1921-1931**

Introduction

Academic speculations around Abkhazia's legal status of 1921-1931 date back to the 1920s when S. Basaria and S. Ashkhatsava, two prominent members of the intelligentsia and ideologists of the Abkhaz separatist movement of the time, published their works on the history of Abkhazia. They intended to provide historiographic substantiation of the so-called state independence of the Abkhazian SSR declared by the Abkhaz Bolsheviks in March 1921.¹ Later, in the 1950s, the subject of the all but forced eradication of the "independent" Abkhazian SSR due to the intrigues of "perfidious" Tbilisi came to the fore when the political situation in the Soviet Union proved conducive to the revived separatist ideology in Abkhazia. Since that time, anti-Georgian riots, encouraged by false historiographic postulates,

* First published as: Another Look at One of the False Historical Postulates of the Abkhazian Separatist Ideology: *On the Question of Abkhazia's Political-State Status in 1921-1931*. In: *The Caucasus & Globalization*. Journal of Social, Political and Economic Studies. Institute of Studies of the Caucasus (Baku, Azerbaijan). CA&CC Press®. Sweden, 2012. Vol. 6. Issue 2, pp. 168-180. [<http://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/another-look-at-one-of-the-false-historical-postulates-of-the-abkhazian-separatist-ideology-on-the-question-of-abkhazias-political-state>]. The text is printed with minor clarifications mentioned in the editor's foreword.

¹ **S. Basaria**. Abkhazia in geographical, ethnographic and economic terms. Sukhum-Kale, 1923 /in Russian/; **S. Ashkhatsava**. The Ways of Development of Abkhaz History. The publication of the Commissariat of Education of Abkhazia, 1925, in Russian.

flared up approximately once every ten years (in 1957, in 1967, and in 1977-1978). At first, information about the riots was suppressed; in the 1970s, however, it became common knowledge.

Recently, Georgian academics (L. Toidze, A. Menteshashvili, J. Gamakharia, and others) have provided exhaustive commentaries and shed light on “misrepresentations of the facts.” However, the separatists are still determined to keep the subject alive; they insist that what they call “independent Abkhazia” was liquidated in 1931. It turned out that in other countries too there are some experts on the Soviet Union’s political and state system whose interpretation of Abkhazia’s legal status in 1921-1931 cannot be accepted as correct. For example, Prof. **Angelika Nußberger**, a prominent German expert in international constitutional law and Director of the Institute for European Law at the University of Cologne, who was awarded an honorary doctorate by the Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University, wondered in one of her monographs why Stalin had made Abkhazia which was allegedly independent until 1924 an autonomous republic and joined it to Georgia: *“Warum hatte Stalin Abchasien, das bis 1924 eigenständige Republik war, zu einer autonomen republik zurückgestuft und der Republik Georgien einverleibt?”*¹ It should be said that this statement shows the author’s complete ignorance of the problem. Even if we agree to treat the Abkhazian SSR as “independent” from Georgia, it remained “independent” not until 1924, as Prof. **A. Nußberger** has wrongly written, but until early 1931.

It was this monograph which forced me to return to a subject already covered in earlier publications² in order to draw the

¹ **A. Nußberger**. *Das Völkerrecht. Geschichte. Institutionen. Perspektiven*. Bonn, 2010, p. 45 [Emphasis added – **Z.P.**].

² I have covered the problem in the following works: **Z. Papaskiri**. *Essays on the History of Contemporary Abkhazia*. Part II, 1917-1993.

attention of the international academic community to it and finally achieve an informational and ideological breakthrough in this sphere.

Political and State Order of Abkhazia in 1921

The state order of Abkhazia became one of the major problems to be tackled by the Bolshevik leaders of Georgia-Abkhazia after the Russian Red Army forcefully established the Soviet power in Georgia. At that time, known in Soviet historiography as the “triumphal march of Soviet power,” the Bolshevik leaders of Russia and their Abkhaz lackeys indulged themselves in vehement anti-Georgian propaganda; the tone was set by Stalin and Ordzhonikidze, two “glorious sons of the Georgian people,” who encouraged, in word and deed, all sorts of provocative actions in all parts of Georgia, particularly Abkhazia.

Here is what Stalin, at that time People’s Commissar for National Affairs of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR), ecstatically wrote in his article, which appeared in *Pravda* on 23 May, 1918, about “**heroic Abkhazia, on the Black Sea coast, which has unanimously risen against the black-guard bands of the Tiflis “government” and is repelling their assault on Sukhum arms in hand**”.¹

In their anti-Georgian propaganda, the Bolsheviks relied on the notorious slogan of the “right of nations to self-determination”; having armed themselves with this Leninist ideological

Tbilisi, 2007, pp. 80-108 /in Georgian/; **Z. Papaskiri**. Abkhazia. *Unfalsified History*. Second revised edition. Tbilisi, 2010, pp. 230-251 /in Russian/.

¹ **J. Stalin**. Works. Volume 4. November 1917-1920. Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1953, p. 97; See also: **L. Toidze**. Apropos of the Political Status of Abkhazia in 1921-1931. – *Investigations in the History of Abkhazia/Georgia*. Tbilisi, 1999, p. 297, in Russian [Emphasis added – **Z.P.**].

perversion, the Abkhaz Bolsheviks led by E. Eshba and N. Lakoba brought up the question of declaring the Abkhazian Soviet Socialist Republic as independent from Georgia. Early in March 1921, a so-called joint session of the Revolutionary Committee of Abkhazia, heads of the local party organizations and (sic!) representatives of the Revolutionary War Council of the 9th Red Army and the Caucasian Bureau of the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party (Bolshevik) passed a decision to declare Abkhazia the Soviet Socialist Republic.¹

Very soon, however, the Abkhaz Bolsheviks, probably under the spell of the Revolutionary War Council of the 9th Red Army, pushed aside what had been said about the national interests of the Abkhaz people and started talking about joining Abkhazia to the RSFSR. Here is a document of great importance. On 26 March 1921, members of the Revolutionary Committee of Abkhazia (E. Eshba, N. Lakoba, P. Agniashvili, and N. Akirtava) sent a telegram to Lenin and Stalin in Moscow to find out what the party leaders thought about the state order of their republic: *“Will Soviet Abkhazia be an independent republic or an administrative unit and how will general policy look...”* In the same telegram they offered their own version: **“Soviet Abkhazia should be part of the Russian Federation”**.² No comment needed. Such were the “patriots” who headed Soviet Abkhazia in those days.

The Kremlin instructed Sergo (Grigory) Ordzhonikidze, its chief emissary in Transcaucasia and Secretary of the Caucasian Bureau of the CCRCP(b), to sort things out regarding Abkhazia’s state order. This was probably the first time that Ordzhonikidze

¹ **B. Sagharia.** The Creation and Strengthening of Public Authorities. *Formation of the SSR of Abkhazia.* – In: *History of the Abkhazian ASSR (1917-1937)*. Sukhumi, 1983, p. 101 /in Russian/.

² **B. Sagharia.** The Formation and Strengthening of the Soviet National Statehood in Abkhazia. 1921-1938. Sukhumi, 1981, pp. 41-42 /in Russian/ [Emphasis added – **Z.P.**].

was confronted with an echo of the unbridled anti-Georgian campaign he and his Georgian and Abkhaz party comrades launched in Abkhazia. On 27 March 1921, he held an urgent meeting with Efrem Eshba, whom he tried to convince to retreat from his previous conviction that Abkhazia should become part of Russia. Eshba, who abandoned the earlier agreement (they met in Moscow even before Soviet power was established in Georgia) under which Abkhazia should have preserved its autonomous status inside Georgia, justified his shift by saying: *“We thought that Abkhazia would become part of Soviet Georgia, but when we came here and felt the atmosphere ... we unanimously decided that Abkhazia should be declared independent, **at least temporarily**, until the congresses of Soviets, in order to eliminate national strife”*.¹

On 28-29 March 1921, a meeting was gathered in Batumi to discuss the structure of Soviet power and the Communist Party in Abkhazia. It was attended by S. Ordzhonikidze, Member of the Revolutionary War Council of the Front and the Caucasian Bureau of the CCRCP(b); Sh. Eliava, Member of the Revolutionary Committee, Central Committee, and Revolutionary War Council of the 9th Red Army and People’s Commissar of the Georgian Navy; M. Toroshelidze, Chairman of the Revolutionary Committee of the Batumi Region and Member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Georgia; E. Eshba, Chairman of the Revolutionary Committee and Member of the Organizing Bureau of the Russian Communist Party in Abkhazia; and N. Lakoba, Member of the Organizing Bureau of the Russian Communist Party in Abkhazia and Military Commissar of Abkhazia. The meeting complied with the request of the “Abkhaz comrades,” albeit with cer-

¹ **B. Sagharia**. The Formation and Strengthening, p. 28; **A. Menteshashvili**. Historical preconditions of modern separatism in Georgia. Tbilisi, 1998, p. 59 /in Russian/ [Emphasis added – **Z.P.**].

tain reservations, and ruled that *“until the congress of Soviets of Abkhazia, the question of the federation of Soviet Abkhazia with the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic and Soviet Socialist Republic Georgia will remain open. Abkhazia is declared the Soviet Socialist Republic. Until the conference, its party organization will be called the Organizing Bureau of the Russian Communist Party in Abkhazia and will work under the Caucasian Bureau of the CCRCP. Decrees of the Revolutionary Committee of Georgia will be taken into account in order to avoid contradictory moves by both revolutionary committees”*.¹ The Georgian side managed to register the temporary nature of Abkhazia’s “independence” as a Soviet Socialist Republic, which, as a state unit, would be obliged to tie its future either to the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic or to Soviet Georgia at the next congress of Soviets. There were no other alternatives.

On 11-20 March 1921, the Revolutionary Committee of Abkhazia officially announced that the Soviet Socialist Republic of Abkhazia had been set up. The same day, it affirmed Lenin about this and praised the *“great liberatory role of the (valiant) Red Army”*.² On 21 May 1921, the Revolutionary Committee of Georgia officially “recognized” and “hailed” *“the foundation of the independent Soviet Socialist Republic of Abkhazia”* and expressed its conviction that *“relations between the SSR of Georgia and the SSR of Abkhazia will be finally settled at the First Congress of the Soviets of Workers’ and Peasants’ Deputies of both Abkhazia and Georgia”*.³

The Bolshevik leaders of Georgia had to keep their promise and give greater freedom to the *“fraternal peoples of Adjara, Abkhazia, and Ossetia.”* As a result, on 21 May 1921, the so-called

¹ **J. Gamakharia, B. Gogia.** Abkhazia – the Historic Province of Georgia. Tbilisi, 1997, p. 469.

² **B. Sagharia.** The Creation, p. 102 [Emphasis added – **Z.P.**].

³ **B. Sagharia.** The Creation, p. 102.

independence of the Abkhazian SSR was recognized. In fact, neither the people in the Kremlin, nor the Georgian communists, nor the Abkhaz Bolsheviks wanted to set up an independent Abkhaz state. The so-called independence was nothing more than a political ruse intended to win the separatist-minded sections of the Abkhaz population over to the Soviet power.

On 12 August 1921, at a regional meeting of the Communist Party, Ordzhonikidze disclosed the true meaning and motives of Abkhazia's "independence": *"When Abkhazia demanded independence we pointed out to the Communists of Abkhazia that a tiny state cannot be independent, but we finally agreed to its independence. We said that if the Abkhaz people mistrust the Georgians, let Abkhazia be independent; let it heal the wounds inflicted by the Mensheviks. Later the Abkhazs would admit that they needed close unity with Georgia, their Soviet neighbour"*.¹ By January 1922, Nestor Lakoba, one of the leaders of the Abkhaz Bolsheviks, had already recognized the historical need for unity with Georgia. In January 1922, speaking at the first regional party conference, he declared: *"When we, the executives of Abkhazia, told our senior party comrades that to preserve the idea of Soviet power among smaller nations, such as Abkhazia (which was very important), we should for one minute declare Abkhazia's independence, we heard: "You can declare independence if this helps to preserve the Soviet idea and strengthen Soviet order in this Abkhazia". Soviet Abkhazia, having experienced independence, answered: "Historical and economic conditions demand that Abkhazia and Georgia become a single whole"*.²

These pronouncements of the latter-day leaders of Georgia-Abkhazia disclosed the falsity and cynicism of the so-called

¹ **A. Menteshashvili.** Historical preconditions of modern separatism in Georgia, p. 64 [Emphasis added – **Z.P.**].

² **L. Toidze.** Apropos of the Political, p. 302 [Emphasis added – **Z.P.**].

Leninist national policy they were pursuing. We all know that its main aim was not the national-state prospect of smaller peoples but setting up a new Communist empire. Prominent Abkhaz historian Stanislav Lakoba aptly pointed out that *“Ilyich (Lenin. – Z.P.) was obsessed with the idea of a world revolution; he thought in the categories of “continents” and “asias,” rather than “georgias” or “abkhazias”*.¹ It should be said, however, that the same author contradicts himself by trying, for some reason, to present Lenin as an “inspirer” of Abkhazia’s independence and sets him against Stalin and Ordzhonikidze whom he accuses of “strangling Abkhazia’s independence.” Stanislav Lakoba told an incredible story: allegedly, Lenin promised Efrem Eshba that he would grant Abkhazia its independence in exchange for the success of “Abkhazian mission” in Turkey”.² The reference is to the “diplomatic mission” the Kremlin entrusted to E. Eshba and N. Lakoba: preliminary negotiations with the government of Kemal Atatürk on a Russian-Turkish treaty which was signed in Moscow on 16 March 1921. Stanislav Lakoba writes that Lenin allegedly granted independence to Abkhazia as a token of gratitude for the agreement on Batumi under which Turkey renounced its claims on Batumi and its environs.³ This means that Lenin, having employed all the means at his disposal to acquire Batumi, “set Abkhazia free.”

Stanislav Lakoba deliberately misleads the reader; he knows that Lenin was not interested in Abkhazia’s independence – he himself offered an unfavourable assessment of Lenin’s political ambitions, of which I have written above. The Abkhaz historian knows full well that setting up the so-called Soviet Socialist Repub-

¹ **S. Lakoba.** Answer to Historians from Tbilisi. *Documents and facts.* Sukhumi, 2001, p. 90 /in Russian/.

² **S. Lakoba.** Answer to Historians from Tbilisi, p. 88.

³ **S. Lakoba.** Answer to Historians from Tbilisi, p. 88

lics (such as Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan) as officially sovereign states headed by members and alternative members of the Central Committee of the **Russian** Communist Party(b) and the Caucasian Bureau of the Central Committee of the **Russian** Communist Party(b) was nothing but a political game. In this way, Soviet Russia tried to camouflage its occupation and annexation of Transcaucasia.

The Transcaucasian countries (Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan) were not, and could not, be independent: the final say on national-state building belonged to the Kremlin and Lenin. Lenin's notorious letter *"To the Communist Comrades of Azerbaijan, Georgia, Armenia, Daghestan, and the Mountaineer Republic"* of 14 April, 1921 is ample evidence of this. Stanislav Lakoba knows that the supreme legislatures of this apology for "sovereign states" had no say in the most important decisions related to the state order of Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan; this right belonged to the supreme party instance – the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party(b) in Moscow. The decisions were implemented by the Caucasian Bureau of the CCRCP(b).

This means that neither Lenin nor other leaders of the Party and the Soviet state intended to set up sovereign states independent from Moscow in the territory of the former Russian Empire when they declared Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan (to say nothing of Abkhazia) as Soviet Socialist Republics. This was nothing but a screen behind which the new Bolshevik leaders of Russia nurtured their imperial designs. This does not mean, however, that those who inspired and organized Abkhazia's "independence" as a socialist republic did not look too far – they wanted to detach Abkhazia from the rest of Georgia.

Independence of the Abkhazian Soviet Socialist Republic was formal; even before it became part of the Georgian SSR on 16

December 1921 with the ambiguous status of a treaty republic, no one treated it as an independent state entity; this much is obvious from numerous official documents of the time. The main and most frequently quoted document is Lenin's letter *"To the Comrades Communists of Azerbaijan, Georgia, Armenia, Daghestan, and the Mountaineer Republic"*. When instructing his party cronies in the Caucasian republics, the leader of the Communist Party and the Soviet government for some reason "neglected" Abkhazia, another "independent" republic. Lenin's telegram of 5 April 1921 (almost a month after the occupation of Georgia) sent to Ordzhonikidze is no less eloquent: *"Your reply is neither full nor clear. Please find out the details from the Georgian Revolutionary Committee. First, **has the Soviet Government of Georgia confirmed concession on the Tkvarcheli mines to the Italians, when, and on what terms?** Reply briefly by telegram, details by letter"*.¹ At that time, Lenin obviously thought of Abkhazia as part of Georgia and did not deem it necessary to discuss the Tkvarcheli mines issue with the Revolutionary Committee of "independent" Abkhazia.

Later, on 28 November 1921, Lenin presented his project of a federation of the Transcaucasian republics to the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party(b). It was approved the next day with slight amendments. It was underscored in the document that *"the Central Committees of Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan shall be instructed (through the Caucasian Bureau) to submit the federation question for broad discussion ... conduct vigorous propaganda in favour of a federation, and*

¹ **V. Lenin.** Collected Works. Vol. 45. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976, p. 115. Lenin mentioned the Tkvarcheli mines issues in his letter *"To the Comrades Communists of Azerbaijan, Georgia, Armenia, Daghestan, and the Mountaineer Republic"*. **V. Lenin.** Collected Works. Vol. 43. Moscow, 1965, p. 199 /in Russian/ [Emphasis added – **Z.P.**].

secure decisions to that effect by the congresses of Soviets in each of these republics".² As we can see, for some reason Lenin never mentioned Abkhazia and planned the new unit as a federation of three socialist republics – Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan.

Historians have pointed out that even after the Abkhazian SSR had been declared, the Revolutionary Committee of Georgia *"repeatedly discussed matters related to Abkhazia at its sittings – issuing it loans, the Tkvarcheli mines, the Bzyb concession... and so on"*.³ When writing about the latter, historians invariably deem it necessary to say that on 21 May 1921, when the Revolutionary Committee of Georgia "recognized," so to speak, the "independent status" of the Abkhazian Soviet Socialist Republic, the plenary session of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Georgia, after discussing the Bzyb concession, ruled: ***"not to object to the signing of this concession by the Government of Georgia if it is substantive and useful"***.⁴

It is invariably pointed out that Abkhazia as an independent entity was absent from the economic union of the Caucasus set up in August 1921 consisting of Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, as well as Daghestan, the Mountaineer Republic, Kabarda, and Nakhichevan. It was likewise absent as an independent unit from the Economic Bureau of the Transcaucasian Republics created by the Caucasian Bureau of the CCRCP(b) on 16 August 1921. *"Representatives of Abkhazia, as well as of other autonomies, had no right to vote"* at the plenary sittings of the Caucasian Bureau of the CCRCP(b).⁵

² **V. Lenin.** Collected Works. Vol. 33. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1973, p. 127.

³ **J. Gamakharia, B. Gogia.** Abkhazia – the Historic Province, p. 117.

⁴ **J. Gamakharia, B. Gogia** Abkhazia – the Historic Province of Georgia, p. 117 [Emphasis added – **Z.P.**].

⁵ **J. Gamakharia, B. Gogia.** Abkhazia – the Historic Province, p. 118.

Letters, instructions, and telegrams written by the leaders of the Communist Party and the Soviet state even before Abkhazia officially joined Georgia on 16 December 1921 directly point to Abkhazia's autonomous status within the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic. Here is the most interesting document. Stalin, who at that time filled the posts of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic People's Commissar for Nationalities and the People's Commissar for Workers' and Peasants' Inspection, clarified the situation for Abel Enukidze, Secretary of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee, as follows: "*Abkhazia is an autonomous part of independent Georgia, which means that it does not and should not have its own representatives in the RSFSR. For the same reason, it cannot get a credit from the RSFSR*".⁶ In his telegram to Enukidze of 13 September 1921, Stalin was even more outspoken: "*The visa for issuing money to the Abkhazs is invalid if not approved by the People's Commissariat for Finances of Georgia... It should be borne in mind that the Abkhazs sold several million poods (Russian measure of weight) of tobacco to the Europeans ... without reporting either to Georgia or to the RSFSR, which has deprived them of the right to ask the RSFSR for money*".⁷

This means that from the very beginning the people in the Kremlin regarded Abkhazia as an autonomous part of Georgia, and it was an official approach rather than the intrigues of Stalin, the "omnipotent Georgian," as Stanislav Lakoba wants to convince his readers.⁸ It is pointless to "rehabilitate" Stalin as a patron of his "Fatherland" (Georgia), as our Abkhaz colleague tries to do. He should have borne in mind that it was Stalin, Ordzhonikidze, and their cronies – the Georgian Communist-internationalists –

⁶ Quoted from: **A. Menteshashvili**. Historical preconditions, p. 67.

⁷ **A. Menteshashvili**. Historical preconditions, p. 67.

⁸ **S. Lakoba**. Essays on the Political History of Abkhazia. Sukhumi, 1990, pp. 83-84 /in Russian/.

who buried Georgia as an independent state. He seems to have forgotten that it was Stalin and Ordzhonikidze who inspired and organized the “triumphal” march of the “valiant” Red Army on Georgia and that later they forced Georgia into the Transcaucasian Federation, after which it lost even the semblance of state sovereignty.

Let us have a look at the official materials which prove that the independence the Bolshevik regime “bestowed” on the Abkhaz Communists as a reward for their indefatigable struggle against the Menshevik government of the Georgian Democratic Republic was merely temporary. It is a well-known fact that from the very beginning the top party leaders represented by the members of the Caucasian Bureau of the CCRCP(b) insisted that the Abkhazian SSR be transformed into an autonomous republic within the Georgian SSR. On 5 July 1921, a plenary meeting of the Caucasian Bureau of the CCRCP(b), which was attended by Stalin, discussed the question of Abkhazia and ruled that party work should be directed *“towards the unification of Abkhazia and Georgia in the form of an autonomous republic as part of Georgia”*.⁹ It should be said that the Abkhaz leaders were not overjoyed. On 15 October 1921, the Joint Sitting of the Organizing Bureau of the Russian Communist Party(b) in Abkhazia and the Revolutionary Committee passed a resolution which spoke of the necessity to establish *“close ties between the SSR of Georgia and Abkhazia ... by concluding an official treaty between the two equal Union republics”*.¹⁰

In his letter to the Caucasian Bureau of 14 November, 1921, Efrem Eshba went even further; he wrote *about “direct (bypassing Georgia) membership of Abkhazia in the Transcauca-*

⁹ **A. Menteshashvili.** Historical preconditions of modern separatism in Georgia, p. 65; **L. Toidze.** Apropos of the Political Status, p. 299.

¹⁰ **J. Gamakharia, B. Gogia.** Abkhazia – the Historic Province, p. 481.

sian Federation".¹¹ Two days later, on 16 November, after discussing the question of "the relations between Abkhazia and Georgia," the Presidium of the Caucasian Bureau of the CCRCP(b), attended by Eshba, passed a different decision: "1. *Independent Abkhazia is economically and politically inexpedient.* 2. Request Comrade Eshba to present his final conclusion *on Abkhazia joining the Federation of Georgia on the principles of a treaty or the RSFSR as an autonomous region*".¹²

This means that the top party leaders passed their verdict: Abkhazia had to part with its illusory independence. This document is highly interesting because it allowed Abkhazia to choose one of two options: either join Georgia as a "treaty republic" or join the RSFSR as merely an autonomous region. Prominent Georgian scholar Levan Toidze has justly pointed out that the status of an autonomous region "was two levels lower." It is commonly believed that this was a sign of "discrimination of Georgia of sorts".¹³

On 24 November 1921, the Caucasian Bureau of the CCRCP(b) passed a decision under which the Organizing Bureau of the Russian Communist Party in Abkhazia was transferred to the Central Committee of the Communist Party(b) of Georgia. On 16 December 1921, the question was finally settled: "a Union Treaty between the Socialist Soviet Republic of Abkhazia and the Socialist Soviet Republic of Georgia" was ceremoniously signed in Tbilisi. Abkhazia became part of the Georgian SSR as a so-called "treaty republic." No one questioned the fact that the treaty of 16 December made Abkhazia part of the Georgian SSR in the legal sense; this was never challenged and never revised. Here is what was written in a definitive work *History of the Abkhazian*

¹¹ **L. Toidze.** *Apropos of the Political Status*, p. 301.

¹² **J. Gamakharia, B. Gogia.** *Abkhazia – the Historic Province*, p. 482.

¹³ **L. Toidze.** *Apropos of the Political Status*, p. 301.

ASSR (1917-1937) published in 1983: “*The fact that Abkhazia joined Soviet Georgia on the strength of a treaty was undoubtedly of great importance... Formation of the SSR of Abkhazia and its joining the SSR of Georgia on the strength of a treaty and through it joining the TSFSR (Transcaucasian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic) and the USSR (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics)...*”.¹⁴ Recently, however, Badzhgur Sagharia, who wrote the passage quoted above, along with some other Abkhaz scholars, has been denying the hitherto obvious fact that Abkhazia did join the Georgian SSR; they insist that unification of Abkhazia and Georgia was registered later, in the Constitutions of Georgia of 1922 and 1927.¹⁵

Certain points of the Treaty of 16 December testify beyond a doubt to the fact that Abkhazia **did join** the Georgian SSR under a treaty and did not unite with it as an equal member of a federation. The Treaty said that “the Soviet Socialist Republic of Georgia and the Soviet Socialist Republic of Abkhazia are establishing military, political, and financial-economic cooperation with each other.

“2. For the purpose of achieving the aforementioned goals, both governments declare united the following Commissariats:

- a) Military;
- b) Finances;
- c) Public Economy;
- d) Post and Telegraph;

¹⁴ **B. Sagharia.** The Creation and strengthening, p. 106.

¹⁵ **B. Sagharia.** Abkhazia in the transition period from capitalism to socialism. *Building the foundations of a socialist society (1921-1941)*. – In: *History of Abkhazia*. Textbook. Ed. by **S. Lakoba**. Sukhumi, 1991, pp. 332-333 /in Russian/; **O. Bgazhba, S. Lakoba.** History of Abkhazia. From ancient times to our days. Textbook for 10-11 years of secondary schools, Sukhumi, 2006, p. 342 /in Russian/.

- e) Workers and Peasant Inspectorate;
- f) Public Commissariat of Justice;
- g) Maritime Transportation.

“Note: **foreign affairs shall remain fully within the competence of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Georgia.**” Under the Treaty, “every regional union, namely within the Federation of the Trans-Caucasus Republics, Abkhazia enters **through Georgia**, which renders one-third of its seats”.¹⁶

All official documents of the congresses of Soviets of both Abkhazia and Georgia confirmed that Abkhazia had joined Georgia. According to Abkhaz historian Sagaria, “the First Congress of Soviets of Abkhazia **legislatively registered the form of Abkhazia’s state and legal status within Georgia**”.¹⁷ The Constitution of Georgia of 1922, to which Stanislav Lakoba refers directly, stated (contrary to what our Abkhaz colleague probably wants to see) that “the Autonomous Socialist Soviet Republic of Adjara, the autonomous region of South Ossetia, and **the Socialist Soviet Republic of Abkhazia are parts of the Socialist Soviet Republic of Georgia**, which they joined based on voluntary self-determination. The Socialist Soviet Republic of Abkhazia is united with the Socialist Soviet Republic of Georgia on the strength of a special treaty of unity between these republics”.¹⁸ This means that all the units enumerated above belonged to a single state which was called the Soviet Socialist Republic of Georgia.

¹⁶ *Union Treaty Between the SSR of Georgia and the SSR of Abkhazia – 16 December 1921.* – Abkhaz World (<http://abkhazworld.com/articles/reports/189-union-treaty-between-december-1921.html>) [Emphasis added – Z.P.].

¹⁷ **B. E. Sagharia.** The Creation and strengthening, p. 106.

¹⁸ **J. Gamakharia, B. Gogia.** Abkhazia – the Historic Province of Georgia, p. 485 [Emphasis added – Z.P.].

Political Speculations of Separatist “Historiography” on the Political-State Status of Abkhazia in 1921-1931

I have already written that separatist “historiography” refuses to admit the fact that on 16 December 1921, the Abkhazian SSR joined the Georgian SSR on the strength of a treaty. Moreover, since the 1970s, this subject has been a target of political-ideological speculations by the separatist leaders. If the Abkhazian SSR united with the rest of Georgia on an equal footing and created a sort of two-constituent federation or, according to the latest fashion, a new “allied state,” this would have been reflected in the name of the state. We all know that at that time so-called “allied states” were formed by uniting Soviet socialist republics on an equal footing; the new states were given new names.

At first, it was the Transcaucasian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic (TSFSR) which signed agreements as a constituent with other Soviet socialist republics – Russia, Ukraine and Byelorussia – on the creation of a single allied state, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). **It should be said that the Treaty on the creation of the USSR specified that the TSFSR consisted of three Soviet socialist republics (Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan). Abkhazia was not mentioned as a constituent which formed the USSR** (even Georgia was not a constituent); it was mentioned among the autonomous republics. Moreover, under Art 15 of Chapter 4 of the Union Treaty, “*the autonomous republics of Adjara and Abkhazia*” (as written in the text. – Z.P.) were de facto put on the same footing as the autonomous regions of the RSFSR As distinct from the autonomous republics of the RSFSR (which had 5 representatives each in the Soviet of Nationalities, the Union’s highest legislature – the same number as the Union republics), Adjara and Abkhazia had 1 representative each (the same number as the autonomous regions of the RSFSR), as well as the “*autonomous regions South Ossetia, Na-*

gorno-Karabakh, and Nakhichevan".¹⁹

As an autonomous republic, Abkhazia was mentioned in the Soviet Constitution of 1924, which confirmed Art 15 of the Union Treaty: "*The **autonomous republics** of Adjaria and **Abkhazia** and the South Ossetian, Nagorno-Karabakh, and Nakhichevan autonomous regions send one representative each to the Soviet of Nationalities*".²⁰ From the very beginning, the Abkhazian SSR was de facto an autonomous unit of Georgia; this is substantiated by the fact that its budget was part of the budget of Georgia, while its government and Communist Party structures were accountable to Georgia's executive and legislative power and the Central Committee of the Communist Party(b) of Georgia.²¹ This was corroborated by the First Regional Conference of the Abkhazian Organization of the Russian Communist Party(b) held on 7-12 January 1922. It renamed the party the Abkhazian organization of the Communist Party(b) of Georgia and elected its delegates to the First Congress of the CPG.²² Later, on 12-18 February 1922, the First Congress of Soviets of Abkhazia elected delegates to the First Congress of Soviets of Georgia.²³ The Abkhazian SSR operated within the legal framework of the Georgian SSR in February 1923, the Presidium of the Central Executive Committee and the Council of People's Commissars of Abkhazia passed a joint decision "*on applying the Criminal Code of the Georgian SSR approved by the*

¹⁹ *History of the Soviet Constitution*. Collection of documents. 1917-1957. Moscow, 1957, p. 229; **J. Gamakharia, B. Gogia**. Abkhazia – the Historic Province of Georgia, p. 489 [Emphasis added – **Z.P.**].

²⁰ **L. Toidze**. Apropos of the Political, p. 303 [Emphasis added – **Z.P.**].

²¹ **L. Toidze**. Apropos of the Political Status, p. 303.

²² **A. Kuprava**. Abkhazia at the beginning of the recovery period. The first events of Soviet power. – In: *History of the Abkhazian ASSR (1917-1937)*. Sukhumi, 1983, pp. 92-93 /in Russian/.

²³ **A. Kuprava**. Abkhazia at the beginning of the recovery period, p. 93.

All-Georgian Central Executive Committee in November 1922 to the entire territory of Abkhazia".²⁴

The above testifies beyond a doubt to the fact that in March 1921 the SSR of Abkhazia was only formally declared independent; its later "unification" with the Georgian SSR was also just a formal act: from the very beginning, Abkhazia was regarded as an autonomous part of Georgia. Those forces in Abkhazia which stirred up the separatist-minded part of the population with demagogic unfounded promises that under Soviet power Abkhazia would become independent could not reconcile themselves to reality. They tried to revise the legal relations between Tbilisi and Sukhumi that had taken shape by 1925 by drafting the first Constitution of Soviet Abkhazia.

The Third Congress of Soviets of Abkhazia held from 26 February to 3 March 1925 in Sukhumi endorsed the Constitution of the SSR of Abkhazia. Today, the ideologists of Abkhaz separatism treat it as a "*Constitution of Sovereign Abkhazia*"²⁵ and present it as such to the people. Early in the 1990s, the separatists brandished it as a "constitutional and legal weapon": on 23 July 1992, the separatist wing of the Supreme Soviet of Abkhazia, in gross violation of the rules which demanded constitutional majority, revived the 1925 Constitution and "endorsed" it as a "Fundamental Law". By violating constitutional order, the separatists tried to remove Abkhazia from the constitutional field of Georgia and declare what they called the Republic of Abkhazia as a state independent of Georgia. We all know that this was the last drop in the bucket; the patience of the Georgian population of Abkhazia snapped. Several days later a conflict began to unfold.

²⁴ **B. Sagharia.** Adoption of the Constitution of the SSR of Abkhazia. – In: *History of the Abkhazian ASSR (1917-1937)*. Sukhumi, 1983, p. 193 /in Russian/.

²⁵ **S. Lakoba.** Answer to Historians from Tbilisi, p. 93.

Without going too far into the numerous legal inconsistencies of the 1925 “Constitution,” it can be said that this “masterpiece” of legal thought removed Abkhazia from the legal field of the Georgian SSR. The higher Communist Party authorities of Georgia and Transcaucasia inevitably paid attention to the “shortcomings” of the Constitution of the Abkhazian SSR. Very soon, probably after a great deal of brainwashing, the leaders of the Communist Party and the government of Abkhazia “saw the light” and promised to readjust the republic’s Fundamental Law. On 26 November, 1925, speaking at the Seventh Conference of the Abkhazian Regional Organization of the CPG, Nestor Lakoba said that *“the Constitution was written in the silliest manner”*.²⁶ An eloquent admission, indeed! Several days later, on 2 December, at the Fourth Congress of the Communist Party of Georgia, he was even more outspoken: *“Comrade Kakhiani (head of the Communist Party of Georgia. – Z.P.) was quite right when he said that **some of the executives had vague ideas that Abkhazia might directly join the Transcaucasian Federation, etc. I myself and many other executives entertained this idea. We have abandoned it once and for all, not because Comrade Kakhiani threatened us with this vagrant thought... In Abkhazia, the problem is that if it really wants to become independent and move away from Georgia, it will tumble down like a house of cards built by a mischievous boy**”*.²⁷

Nestor Lakoba was consistently repentant. His speech at the Third Session of the All-Georgian Central Executive Committee, the supreme legislature of Georgia, held in Sukhumi, the capital of Abkhazia, on 13 June 1926 is the best example of Lako-

²⁶ Quoted from: **J. Gamakharia, B. Gogia** Abkhazia – the Historic Province of Georgia, p. 491.

²⁷ **J. Gamakharia, B. Gogia.** Abkhazia – the Historic Province of Georgia, p. 491 [Emphasis added – Z.P.].

ba's metamorphosis. He said that *"from the very beginning of Soviet power, some people who failed to understand how things stood and some of our enemies have been trying to undermine power in the Republic of Abkhazia by saying that Abkhazia can leave Georgia or can remain with it. Is this so? To avoid misunderstandings we should say in so many words that **Abkhazia cannot leave Georgia; it has no such intention and does not want to.** Soviet Abkhazia has no intention of leaving Soviet Georgia; it is prepared to go anywhere with Soviet Georgia, **as part of Soviet Georgia**, even to the next world, if you will... Abkhazia and Georgia have one common destiny. **Abkhazia joined Georgia of its own free will.** Long live Soviet Georgia and the working masses of Abkhazia, which are 100 percent loyal to it despite all the rumors!"*.²⁸

This was what one of the ideologists of the seditious 1925 Constitution of Abkhazia said on different occasions. This means that by that time the political situation in the country and the Communist Party had changed, probably because Trotsky and his cronies had lost their positions in Abkhazia, while Stalin, on the other hand, was gaining power and consolidating his grip on the party and the state. This is what Abkhaz historian Stanislav Lakoba says.²⁹ On 27 October, 1926, the results of the *"educational efforts of the higher Communist Party and Soviet authorities* (the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Georgia and All-Georgia Central Executive Committee in particular) were summed up. The Third Session of the Central Executive Committee of Abkhazia, in fulfillment of the instructions issued by the Third Session of the All-Georgian Central Executive Committee, which pointed out that the Constitution of the SSR of Abkhazia

²⁸ **J. Gamakharia, B. Gogia.** Abkhazia – the Historic Province of Georgia, pp. 494-495 [Emphasis added – **Z.P.**].

²⁹ **S. Lakoba.** Answer to Historians from Tbilisi, pp. 93-94.

should be brought into harmony with the Constitution of the Georgian SSR, adopted an amended version of the Constitution. It was finally endorsed in March 1927 by the Fourth Congress of Soviets of Abkhazia.

The new version differed radically from the previous one. Chapter I of the Constitution said: “***The Republic of Abkhazia is a socialist state of workers and peasants*** (not a “sovereign” state, as it was described in the 1925 Constitution. – Z.P.) ***which by the force of a special treaty is part of the Socialist Soviet Republic of Georgia and entering the Transcaucasian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic through the Georgian SSR***”. The same chapter said that “***the citizens of the Socialist Soviet Republic of Abkhazia, while retaining their republican citizenship, are, by the same token, citizens of the Socialist Soviet Republic of Georgia***”. This was absent from the previous version.³⁰ The article on the state language was corrected. In the 1925 Constitution, only Russian was granted the status of the state language. In the new version, Article 8 of Chapter I said that “***the languages of state institutions on the territory of the Abkhazian SSR are: Abkhazian, Georgian, and Russian***”.³¹ Under Article 16 of the same chapter, the SSR of Georgia was one of the constituents (the USSR, TSFSR, and SSR of Abkhazia) which within the competence “*determined by their constitutions*” had the right to exploit the state resources (land, forests, water, subsoil, etc.) of Abkhazia.³²

The Constitution established the level and order of involvement of the people of Abkhazia in governing the Georgian

³⁰ J. Gamakharia, B. Gogia. Abkhazia – the Historic Province, p. 497.

³¹ *Basic Law (Constitution) of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Abkhazia, 27 October 1926.* – *Abkhaz World* (<http://abkhazworld.com/articles/reports/338-basic-law-constitution-ssr-abkhazia-1926.html>) [Emphasis added – Z.P.].

³² J. Gamakharia, B. Gogia. Abkhazia – the Historic Province, p. 498.

state. Article 18 of Chapter II said that *“the representatives of Soviets of the Socialist Soviet Republic of Abkhazia shall take part in the All-Georgian Congress of Soviets on the basis of the following quota: one deputy per 10,000 inhabitants”*.³³ Article 19 of the same chapter said that *“the All-Georgian Congress of Soviets shall elect representatives of the Socialist Soviet Republic of Abkhazia to the **All-Georgian Central Executive Committee**; the number of representatives shall be **determined by the All-Georgian Congress of Soviets**”*.³⁴ This means that **in the supreme legislature of the Georgian state** (and not of a mythical “allied” state), Abkhazia had no quota established by parity; the number of its representatives was established by the All-Georgia Congress of Soviets.

The Constitution kept Abkhazia within the Georgian state and legal universe. Article 22 of Chapter II said that *“the Codes, Decrees, and Decisions adopted by the All-Georgian Central Executive Committee of applied to the entire territory of the Georgian SSR shall be binding in the territory of the Socialist Soviet Republic of Abkhazia”*.³⁵ Article 24 of the same chapter specified that *“**the All-Georgian Congress of Soviets and the All-Georgian Central Executive Committee shall have the right to revoke the Resolutions of the Congress of Soviets, Central Executive Committee, and the Council of People’s Commissars of the Socialist Soviet Republic of Abkhazia** that contravene the provisions specified in Chapter II of this Constitution”*.³⁶

³³ *Basic Law (Constitution) of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Abkhazia, 27 October 1926.*

³⁴ *Basic Law (Constitution) of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Abkhazia, 27 October 1926 [Emphasis added – Z.P.].*

³⁵ *Basic Law (Constitution) of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Abkhazia, 27 October 1926.*

³⁶ *Basic Law (Constitution) of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Abkhazia, 27 October 1926 [Emphasis added – Z.P.].*

Article 92 of Chapter IV of the Abkhazian Constitution proved beyond a doubt that the SSR of Abkhazia was not a Soviet republic independent of Georgia: ***“The state budget of the Socialist Soviet Republic of Abkhazia is a part of the budget of the Socialist Soviet Republic of Georgia and it shall be approved by the All-Georgian Central Executive Committee as a constituent part of the all-state budget of the Socialist Soviet Republic of Georgia”***.¹

The articles of the Abkhazian Constitution adopted by the Fourth Congress of Soviets of Abkhazia in March 1927 prove that all the allegations that the SSR of Abkhazia was supposedly a sovereign Soviet republic which had established “equal federative state-legal relations” with Georgia are totally unfounded. At his time, S. Basaria, a well-known member of the Abkhaz separatist-minded intelligentsia fervently supported these allegations.² Today, the ideological leaders of the separatists have not yet parted with this illusion.

In fact, there is no doubt that from the very beginning (at least from 16 December 1921 when it joined the Georgian SSR as a “treaty republic”) the SSR of Abkhazia was regarded as an inalienable part of a single Georgian state.

By the late 1920s, it became clear, writes prominent Abkhaz historian Badzhgur Sagaria, that *“the decade of change in the political, economic, and cultural life of Abkhazia and Georgia as a whole called for different forms of state constitutional relations between them”*.³ A special document of the Council of People’s Commissars of Abkhazia pointed out that *“the treaty of 16 December 1921*

¹ *Basic Law (Constitution) of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Abkhazia, 27 October 1926* [Emphasis added – **Z.P.**].

² **J. Gamakharia, B. Gogia.** Abkhazia – the Historic Province, p. 125.

³ **B. Sagharia.** Transformation of the Contractual SSR of Abkhazia into an Autonomous Republic. – In: *History of the Abkhazian ASSR (1917-1937)*. Sukhumi, 1983, p. 249 /in Russian/.

... no longer relates to reality” since “the real ... relations between these republics have been specified by their Constitutions”. On the strength of this, the Council of People’s Commissars of Abkhazia concluded that *“the term “treaty republic” applied to the SSR of Abkhazia had lost its meaning”.*¹ In April 1930, the Third Session of the Central Executive Committee of Abkhazia passed a decision, on the strength of a report delivered by Nestor Lakoba, to remove the term “treaty republic” from the Abkhazian Constitution. In February 1931, the Sixth Congress of Soviets of Abkhazia approved this decision and amended the Constitution. From that time on Abkhazia became an Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic within the Georgian SSR.

This dealt a heavy blow to the separatist forces of Abkhazia, which for nearly a decade had been keeping the nation under ideological pressure. This act revealed the falsity and demagoguery of the so-called Leninist national policy that had allegedly liberated the Abkhaz nation subjugated by what was described as the “bourgeois-nationalist” government of democratic Georgia and granted it national-state “independence.” In fact, this apology for independence granted to the Abkhaz people was nothing more than a token of gratitude for the “heroism” they had shown when fighting the Georgian Democratic Republic; it was an illusion from the very beginning. **In 1931, the relations that had taken shape after 16 December 1921 when the so-called Union treaty between Abkhazia and Georgia was signed, which made Abkhazia a “treaty republic” within Georgia, were officially confirmed and nothing more.**

It should be said that in the 1920s-1930s the changed political-state status of Abkhazia was nothing out of the ordinary: it was part of the policy pursued by the leaders of the Communist Party and the state and had nothing to do with Stalin’s nationality. Here

¹ **B. Sagharia.** Transformation of the Contractual SSR, p. 250.

are several examples: in July 1920, Nakhichevan became an “independent” Soviet Socialist Republic only to be transformed in February 1923 into an autonomous territory (later an autonomous republic) within the Azerbaijan SSR. In 1918, the Stavropol, Kuban, and Black Sea socialist republics appeared, which later became administrative regions and territories of the RSFSR.

This is the whole truth about the allegedly independent Soviet Socialist Republic of Abkhazia in 1921-1931.

Conclusion

The above suggests that in 1921-1931 the so-called sovereign Soviet Socialist Republic of Abkhazia was officially part of Georgia; that is, it was Georgia’s autonomous unit both de facto and de jure. Allegations that the SSR of Abkhazia was a state unit independent of Georgia and that it lost this status in 1931 due to the intrigues of Stalin, “an omnipotent Georgian,” and the Communist leaders in Tbilisi, are nothing more than political insinuations of the ideologists of Abkhaz separatism determined to exploit this “historical argument” to inflame anti-Georgian sentiments among the Abkhazs.

THE NATURE OF THE CONFLICT IN ABKHAZIA AND ITS PARTICIPANTS

*Or Those Who Fought Against Georgia**

Quite a lot has been said and written about the Conflict in Abkhazia so far, but the problem of identification of the reasons of the conflict and specification of its nature together with other issues still remains in the centre of everyone's attention. It must be noted that most authors quite fairly think that the Abkhazian conflict did not start on 14 August 1992, when units of the Ministry of Defence and of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia were transferred to the West to provide the security of the railway mainline according to the decision of the Government of Georgia (which had already been acknowledged as a sovereign state by the international community and became a full member of the UN).

The **armed forces were transferred inside the Georgian State, on the territory of the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia** while the so-called "Abkhazian Guard" aiming at destructing everything around, unexpectedly opened fire near Okhurei (Ochamchire district) and Agudzera (Gulripshi district). The prerequisites of military confrontation in Abkhazia had been forming at least during the last hundred years: from the very beginning of tsarist Russia and then the Bolshevik regime of the Kremlin did their utmost to arouse anti-Georgian passions and establish favourable conditions for the separation of Abkhazia from the rest of Georgia.

* First published as **Z. Papaskiri**. The Essence of the Conflict in Abkhazia and its Participants. *Or Those Who Struggled Against Georgia*. – In «*Policy of Genocide and Ethnic Cleansing in Abkhazia (Georgia) – the Main Tool of aggressive Separatism*». Proceedings of the International Conference-Seminar, July 6-7, 1999, Tbilisi, 1999, pp. 133-142. The text is printed with corrections due to the serious linguistic misinterpretations made during the translation in the original edition.

Armed Abkhaz resistance followed by the inspiration of the conflict was not expected, indeed, because the relocation of the military contingent planned by the central authorities was coordinated by Vladislav Ardzinba. However, he for his part, not only made any attempt to avoid “**misunderstanding**”, but called up all the population of Abkhazia to unleash “civil war” against “Georgian occupants and aggressors”. According to Svetlana Chervonnaya’s, the Russian political scientist and unbiased observer, remark this very call of V. Ardzinba has to be considered the only provocation of the conflict, and not the relocation of the Georgian Troops on the territory of its own state.¹

It must be slated from the very beginning that the Georgian government had every legal right to decide independently the question of the necessity of the transfer of troops into any region in its own state. Hence, the assertions of the Abkhaz separatists and their protectors and instigators about the annexation and occupation of Abkhazia by Georgia, **naturally, is the demonstration of complete political and juridical ignorance and aimed at political speculations.**

Despite that fact, even nowadays, when the whole world and the international organizations such as UN, OSCE, and others plainly admitted on many occasions that **Abkhazia is the integral part of the single and indivisible Georgian State**, the separatists stubbornly, though in vain, strive to deceive the world community and accuse Georgia in aggression against Abkhazia. However, in reality, the character of the conflict in Abkhazia is obvious to everyone; especially it could be said about the fact that **it was an ordinary separatist mutiny fully provoked by the Russian imperial forces.**

¹ **S. Chervonnaya.** Abkhazia – 1992: Post-Communist Vendée. Moscow, 1993, p. 35 /in Russian/.

Under the bolshevik hypocritical slogan concerning the notion of national self-determination the separatists considered themselves as the masters of the autonomous republic and suppressed the **right of self-identification of native Georgian residents of Abkhazia** (which constituted more than half of the whole population of the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia) and irrespective of the residents' will and view-points managed to withdraw Abkhazia from the jurisdiction of Georgia and declared it the de facto independent slate.

According to the international law, **this fact must be considered as the violation of territorial integrity of the sovereign state** and comprises the subject of categorical condemn from the side of the international community. That's why the "independence of Abkhazia" had not been acknowledged by anyone and it still remains the so-called "unrecognised republic". Besides, the criminal consequences of separatism were unanimously condemned by different international forums.

Budapest and Lisbon summits of OSCE formally acknowledged the fact of ethnic cleansing in Abkhazia, confirmed by the UN Security Council, while the CIS states including Russia legalized the economic sanctions (economic blockade) against the separatist regime in Sukhumi

As for the issue of specifying the nature of the Abkhazian conflict, I would like to attract your attention to the popular phrase the "senseless war." The authors of the words quite exactly understand the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict as a fratricidal war, hence, absolutely senseless. On the one hand, the state of affairs is as follows: the **Abkhaz Papaskiri** with a weapon in his hand fights against the **Georgian Papaskiri** and all his family for their expulsion from Abkhazia. During the military confrontation, one of the newspapers issuing in Sukhumi published a list of the killed from both sides. It was found out that the representatives of the same

family names (the Chitanavas, Kirias, Dzadzamias, Zhvanias, Akhvledianis, etc.) were killed on both sides of the front line. Those Abkhazians who formerly were Georgians and afterwards changed their nationality, were just among the most well-known Abkhazian militants. One of them, a certain Arthur Chitanava, was at the head of mass shooting of Georgians in Eshera.¹

It was also former Georgian and later Abkhaz Oleg Papaskiri (the leader of “Sukhumi battalion”) who, together with his subordinates, killed Zhiuli Shartava and his companions. Thus, talking about the senseless war may seem unjust if one takes into consideration thousands of deaths of those who died defending their native land.

On the other hand, the same may be said about those young Abkhazs who believed that they were defending freedom of native Abkhazia. Their lot is even more tragic because they indeed became the victims of the most senseless gamble. The separatist leaders forced the Abkhaz youth to struggle against their own history and under the flag of the king Leon II. At the end of the 8th century, it was that very king Leon who paved the way for the establishment of the common West Georgian state. Nevertheless, the name of Leon II, the founder of the unified West Georgian State, had been used as an ideological symbol of the war against Georgian statehood. The enemies of Georgia, which is the only legal successor of the state founded by Leon II, held the insignias of Leon II. They were decorated for the grief and misfortunes they induced on the people who always defended the integrity of Georgia, the great homeland founded by Leon II and his successors. Yes, we may say, that only the Georgians were the people who defended the flag of Leon II in this war; they defended the Georgian-

¹ See: **L. Chkhcnkeli**. There Is No Double Truth. *Testimony of the Resident of State Intelligence Department of the Abkhazian Autonomous Republic*. Tbilisi, 1996, p. 46 /in Russian/.

Abkhazian state, bequeathed to them by Leon II; they defended its integrity to the great extent, not from the perplexed and fooled Abkhaz separatists, but from mostly hidden although sometimes direct aggression of the neighbouring state. This war must be considered a “civil war” mainly in reference to the Georgians and it is painful to comprehend that some Georgians even now are unable to perceive where they had to stand at the moment when actually the fate of Georgian state had been decided and against whom they had to take up arms.

Not only the Abkhazs having separatist aspirations conducted this war against Georgia. It seems absurd to suppose that the operations of seizing Gagra and Sukhumi had been planned by the “Abkhazian General Staff” or permanent bombardment of Sukhumi and Ochamchire was performed by “Abkhazian aviation” and artillery.

The contribution of military structures and volunteers of the neighbouring country in the “victory” of the Abkhazs is absolutely obvious to everyone now and at the same time documented too. It was the revenge of “*red and brown Russia*,” because, despite the false, ostensible democracy, its leaders properly punished “disobedient”, “rebellious” Georgia, which once provoked other union republics to mutiny and the contribution of its leader Eduard Shevardnadze in the demolition of the communist totalitarian system of the Russian empire was so great.

What actual forces were confronting Georgia in Abkhazia? First of all, it was the so-called “*Confederation of Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus*” (CMPC) which even before the war was overtly against the integrity of the Georgian people and instigated the Abkhazs to confrontation. As it is known, from the very first days of the conflict the order of the “President” and the chairman of the “Parliament” of the Confederation of Mountain People of the Caucasus Musa Shanibov and Yusuf Soslanbekov was published. It said:

“In accordance with the fact, that all measures of peaceful settlement of the question of the withdrawal of the occupational forces of Georgia from the territory of sovereign Abkhazia, are exhausted and to carry out the resolution of the CMPC parliament session we order:

- 1. To all the staffs of the Confederation to be responsible for providing transfer of the volunteers to the territory of Abkhazia for armed resistance against the aggressors.*
- 2. To all armed formations of the Confederation in case of confrontation with any forces join the battle and by all means fight their way through to the territory of Abkhazia.*
- 3. To declare the city of Tbilisi the zone of disaster and use all the measures including acts of terrorism.*
- 4. To declare all persons of Georgian nationality as hostages on the territory of Confederation.*
- 5. To detain all Georgians, all the goods destined for Georgia, and to hamper their transfer, etc.²*

We think that the above-mentioned document needs no comment. There exists the data that the armed formations (at least small groups) of the Confederation were located in Abkhazia long before the beginning of the conflict and the Abkhaz youth had combat training in Grozny.³

Since August 14, 1992 the number of Confederates had been increasing from day to day. In August 1993 in the area of Lidzava, on the front line I myself met Chechen militant, a certain Khureish Auldinov, who confirmed that he had been fighting in Abkhazia since August 21, 1992. Not ordinary militants but well-trained

² **S. Chervonnaya.** Abkhazia – 1992: Post-Communist Vendée, p. 193.

³ This information was announced some months before the war on the Abkhazian television by Oleg Damenia, one of the ideologists of the Abkhazian separatism.

officers of the Soviet Army arrived from the North Caucasus. First of all, it is necessary to mention colonel Sultan Sosnaliev (Kabardian by birth), the officer of the Soviet army, who was appointed to act as the “Defence Minister” of Abkhazia. A lot of North Caucasians – from Adyghe, Kabardino-Balkaria, Ossetia, Karachay⁴-Cherkessia.

Chechen volunteers were the most numerous and well-trained among the Confederates and Shamil Basaev with his Chechen battalion (It must be noted that during the Chechen war that battalion became known as the “*Abkhaz battalion*”). The separatists had great expectations concerning Sh. Basaev's support after the fall of Sukhumi too, when they were preparing for the operation in Kodori Gorge. but afterwards instead of Sh. Basaev's group, they used the Armenian battalion named after Bagramian. As is also known, some Chechens together with the Cossacks and Abkhazs were transferred to Samegrelo in October to participate in the campaign of the Zviad Gamsakhurdia's Supporters.⁵

⁴ One of Karachais Kassim Dbalov together with the Russians Semion Smetanin and Roman Krasnov was arrested by militiamen for organizing massacre in the village of Odishi (Sukhumi district). These monsters killed 26 Greeks, the residents of the village using a machine gun. Later Dbalov was sentenced to death, but the verdict had not been executed. Based on my information, in January-February 1994 Tamaz Nadareishvili made a special statement concerning the mass execution of the Greek population in the village of Odishi, but this fact of genocide met no due resonance.

⁵ I obtained this information on October 19, 1993 from Beslan Kobakhia my former student and Minister in V. Ardzinba's government during the war, when he visited me in the prison cell of the Ministry of Internal Affairs together with Daur Barganjia, the deputy of the Supreme Soviet of Abkhazia and my colleague from the university, and Daur Margania, also my former student and a friend who after the seizure of Sukhumi was appointed a deputy commandant of the city. It must be mentioned that Sergei Bganba – the deputy Prosecutor of Abkhazia denied the direct participation of the Chechens, Abkhazs, and Cossacks in the events of Samegrelo after the failure of Kobalia's campaign.

The Cossacks were one of the main assault groups of the separatists. There are sufficient available data about it now, first of all, testimonies of the volunteers themselves, e.g. according to the evidence of the correspondent of the newspaper "Izvestia" Aleksey Chelnokov, "the main assault force attacking the city (the last attack in September 1993 – Z.P.) was the battalion of Cossacks. They were followed by Abkhaz, Chechen, Ossetian, Adighean battalions (10 in all)". According to the same source, the commander or the Cossack "Sotnia" (Cossack squadron), which occupied the centre of Sukhumi was the ataman of the Kubanian Cossacks Nikolai Lunko.⁶

Colonel Vyiacheslav Ilyunichev was recognized as a hero of Abkhazia and chosen as the ataman of the "Union of Abkhazian Cossacks".⁷ There is also information about the activities of a certain Igor Samoilov, who was arrested on September 29.⁸ Among the Cossacks fighting in Abkhazia one may single out Andrei Serdyukov, Major-General of the Union of the Cossacks in Abkhazia⁹ and the activities of Major-General Ivan Kononov, chief ataman of the Cossacks association "The Cossack troops of Russia".¹⁰ Yury

⁶ **Al. Chelnokov.** Bloody Feast of Gudautian Separatists. – In book: "Crucified Georgia". The collection was compiled by **B. Phipia, Z. Chichviladze.** St.-Petersburg, p. 119 /in Russian/.

⁷ **I. Kiryanova.** Our Cossacks Are Being Ousted from Sukhumi. – In book: "Crucified Georgia". The collection was compiled by **B. Phipia, Z. Chichviladze.** St.-Petersburg, p. 230 /in Russian/.

⁸ **I. Kiryanova.** Our Cossacks Are Being Ousted from Sukhumi, p. 231. His comrades protested against his detention and tried to set him free. As I was informed by Cossack Yury Romantsov with whom I spent a day and a night in the isolation cell in Sukhumi, the Cossacks attacked the city militia where Samoilov had been detained. During the assault one of the soldier's grenade exploded unexpectedly and he, along with one or two other militants, died on the spot.

⁹ **Al. Chelnokov.** The Cossack general was used and forgotten. – In book: "Crucified Georgia". The collection was compiled by **B. Phipia, Z. Chichviladze.** St.-Petersburg, pp. 233-237 /in Russian/.

¹⁰ **I. Kononov.** First of All Russia Must Defend Her Fellow Countrymen. – In: "Nezavisimaya Gazeta", 21.IX.1996. /in Russian/.

Blinov, the ataman of the Cossack Squadron was awarded the military rank the Hero of Abkhazia. Also Boris Akulinichev (“Akula”/“Shark” by nickname), Nikolai Gusko, commander of the Cossack Squadron, and Genadi Kolodin (“Koloda”/“log” by nickname) “displayed their courage”.¹¹

The centres for recruiting the Cossacks and other “militants” functioned in Russia. Among them, one may name “*the Russian legion*” led by Nikolay Lysenko, which was quartered in St. Petersburg. Recruitment of militants was conducted by major-general Lunyev, who recruited 80 soldiers of OMON from the city of Riga.¹² His namesake, a member of the “*Russian legion*” Igor Lunyev delivered 32 mercenaries – Russians, Chechens, Adighes to Zugdidi to the headquarters of the Zviad Gamsakhurdia.¹³ The Cossacks from the Don, Kuban, and Terek were invited by the member of the Supreme Soviet V. Ardzinba and also by Victor Loginov, the leader of the Abkhazian organization “*Slavianski Dom*” (*Slavic House*), Candidate of Historical Sciences, my former student, who was quite close to me for some time and who used to display his sympathy to Georgia and Georgians prior to 1988-1989.

In spite of everything mentioned above, not “volunteers” (Confederates, Cossacks etc.), but the regular units, specialists, and officers of the Russian army played the principal role in the “Victory” of the Abkhazs. As the witness and the direct participant of the Abkhazian war (I was a senior officer of the Second Army Corps of Georgian Army) I have to declare categorically that the volunteer-Cossacks and the confederates would never gain victory even over disarmed Georgian troops. Georgia was beaten by the aviation and artillery of Russia.

¹¹ **L. Chkhcnkeli.** There Is No Double Truth, p. 65.

¹² **L. Chkhcnkeli.** There Is No Double Truth, pp. 18-19.

¹³ **Y. Kalinina.** The Act of Terrorism of Government Scale. – In book: “*Cru-cified Georgia*”. The collection was compiled by **B. Phipia, Z. Chich-viladze.** St.-Petersburg, p. 176.

Among the regular units participating in the Abkhazian war, the regiment of paratroopers and storm-troopers in Gudauta has to be singled out. One of its battalions (commander Roman Semigulin) had been taking part in the military operations from the first days of the conflict and was located on the part of the territory of the seismological laboratory in Eshera. The plan of the assault of the village Shroma (Sukhumi district) was worked out and headed by the officer of the same regiment, Lieutenant Colonel Kudinov. The operations performed on the Territory of Eshera were led by another officer of the same regiment, Lieutenant Colonel Vladimir Kravchuk. The military operations were planned and carried out by generals Aleksandr Chindarov and Aleksandr Alekseyev. Aviation led by the latter, actively participated in the assault against Sukhumi in March 1993. Before the beginning of the operation against the village of Shroma, the maneuvers with the participation of the Russian and Abkhaz field commanders were held on the river Khipsta. They were conducted under the guidance of general Chindarov. They performed the rehearsal of crossing the river Gumista. During the operation, the main assault had to be conducted by the attack planes led by general Chindarov. Generals Victor Sorokin and Aleksey Sigutkin also played a significant role.¹⁴

Anatoli Sidorenko – colonel of the airborne forces was one of the active figures among the Russian military men. He was the head of military formations, which after the Peace Agreement of July 27, 1993, were carefully hidden by the Abkhazs.¹⁵

¹⁴ **L. Chkhcnkeli.** There Is No Double Truth, pp. 26-29.

¹⁵ **Y. Kalinina.** The Act of Terrorism of Government Scale, p. 176. Perhaps, this Sidorenko is the very officer who after the war, during the certain period, held quite a high position in Sukhumi. It is possible that he was the person who came to visit the above-mentioned Cossack militant Yury Romantsov. The words of the infuriated officer to his subordinate (who was detained for debauchery) were quite expressive. I had heard then myself: *"You must be shameful, you are the Russian Soldier!"*.

Colonel-general Georgi Kondratiev, the first deputy Defence Minister of Russia had made the special contribution to the military support of the Abkhazian separatists. Under his direct guidance, the 345th airborne regiment was transformed from Ganja to Gudauta at the end of August 1992. Under his direct order the captain 1st rank B. Fomin undertook sham training on October 2, 1992, the day of assault in Gagra, the real aim of which was: "...not to permit the Georgian landing in the area of Pitsunda (Gagra) and even open the fire if needed".¹

The general Kondratiev himself was on the board of one of the ships (*"Bezukoriznenyi"/"Impeccable"*) for one hour. Even the Russian Defence Minister Pavel Grachev admitted the participation of Russian regular units in the military operations. He said that the *"Russian units performed "Selective objects" fire in the direction of Sukhumi: they were striking only those spots from which the shelling of the seismological laboratory in Eshera was conducted"*.² There were other cynical declarations as well. P. Grachev accused the Georgian side in trickery – as if Georgians repainted their planes making the same identification marks as of Russian army and then bombed their own cities themselves. This sacrilegious declaration was denied on March 19, 1993 when Russian jet SU-27 (№11) was shot down near Sukhumi. The aircraft was piloted by major Vatslav Shipko, who was transferred from Rostov region to Bombora airport, where he got his combat mission.

This is only a small part of the material which clearly confirms the direct participation of Russian military structures in the conflict in Abkhazia. We are not going to discuss the role of political circles (particularly the significant part of Duma deputies) in the inspiration of the conflict now. It is the subject of a separate debate.

¹ *The report of the commander of the ship detachment in the period of 22. 09 – 05.10. 1992.* from the book **L. Chkhcnkeli**. There Is No Double Truth, p. 61.

² **L. Chkhcnkeli**. There Is No Double Truth, p. 63.

A p p e n d i x

ZUR FRAGE DER NATIONALSTAATLICHEN MENTALITÄT DES HERRSCHERHAUSES SCHARWASCHIDSE*

Das Herrscherhaus der Scharwaschidse stand im Verlaufe vieler Jahrhunderte an der Spitze Aphasetis (Abchasiens), zunächst im Status eines Eristavis (Herzog), später dann (vom 17. Jahrhundert an) im Range eines Regierenden (Herrschers). In der Historiographie gibt es keine einheitliche Meinung über die Herkunft und über den zeitlichen Aufstieg des Geschlechts der Scharwaschidse. Der erste Vertreter – Dotaghod Scharwaschidse (Eristavi von Abchasien) wird (im Zusammenhang mit den Ereignissen der 1280er Jahre) im Werk: „*Istoriani da asmani scharawandetani*“ („*Geschichten und Lobreden von Gekrönten*“) erwähnt.¹

Nach Meinung eines Teils der Forscher (Mari Brosset, Dimitri Gulia, Surab /Zurab/ Antschabadse, Giorgi Antschabadse) sollen die Scharwaschidse Nachfahren eines Vertreters des Hauses Scharwan-Schach gewesen sein, die Dawid Agmaschenebeli (Erbauer) nach der Angliederung von Anisi an Georgien nach Abchasien versetzte.² Aber es gibt auch die Meinung (Niko Berdsenischwili),

* Erstveröffentlichung in: *Georgica*. Zeitschrift für Kultur, Sprache und Geschichte Georgiens und Kaukasiens. 31 Jahrgang 2008. SHAKER VERLAG. Aachen, S. 64-74 [<https://iberiana.wordpress.com/afxazeti/scharwaschidse/>].

¹ *Das Leben Kartlis*. Der Text gemaess aller Haupthandschriften von **S. Kauchtschischwili** bestimmt. Bd. II. Tbilisi 1959, S. 33-34 /in Georgisch/.

² **M. Brosset**. Geschichte von Georgien. Ausgeb. von **Niko Ghoghoberidse**. Teil I, Tbilisi 1895, S. 154 /in Georgisch/; **D. Gulia**. Geschichte von Abchasien. Teil I. Tiflis 1925, S. 138, 208 /in Russisch/; **S. Antschabadse**. Aus der Geschichte des mittelalterlichen Abchasiens (VI-XVII Jahrhunderte. Suchumi, 1959, S. 192 /in Russisch/; **G.**

dass möglicherweise die Vorfahren von Scharwaschidse bereits in der Mitte des 11. Jahrhunderts eine aktive Rolle im Rahmen des abchasischen Saeristavo (Herzogtums) spielten.¹ Und zwar wird in der als „*Matiane Kartlisa*“ genannten Chronik ein Kuabuleli Tschatschas-Dse Otagho genannt, der „mit einem Heer Abchasiens *Anakopia* (Bagrat IV – S. P.) umzingelte“.² In diesem Fall wurde die Aufmerksamkeit auf die Ähnlichkeit des Namens des am Ende des 12. Jahrhunderts lebenden Eristavi (Scharwaschidse) – D-**ota-ghod** – mit dem Namen des Kuabuleli Tschatschadse-Dse **Otagho** gerichtet, aufgrund derer sich manche Forscher (Schalva Inal-ipa) den Namen des Geschlechts (Tschatschas-Dse) – als georgische Form vorstellen.³

Wir halten eine Identität zwischen „Tschatschas-Dse“ – und „Tschatschba“ für völlig zulässig, aber es ist schwer, sich vorzustellen, wie man „Tschatschas-Dse“– „Tschatschba“ mit Scharwaschidse in Verbindung bringen kann. Z. Antschabadse wies völlig richtig darauf hin, dass die georgischen Formen der Nachnamen des abchasischen Adels unmittelbar aus den entsprechenden abchasischen Namen hervorgehen: Marschania aus Amarschani, Inalischwili aus Inal-ipa, Antschabadse aus Atschba, Dsiapschischwili aus Dsia-pschipa, Marghania aus Maani usw. Was Scharwaschidse betrifft, so ist dieser Name eine Ausnahme von dieser Regel. Die abchasische Form des Namens – „Atschatschba“– „Tschatschba“ hat nichts mit seiner georgischen Form Scharwaschidse gemeinsam.

Antschabadse. Über Abstammung von Haus Scharwaschidse. – In: *Georgische Quellenkunde*, XI, Tbilisi 2006, S. 72-80 /in Georgisch/.

¹ **N. Berdsenischwili.** Brief an Redakteur. – In: *Literarische Zeitung*, 8.II.1957, N. 6 /in Georgisch/.

² *Eine Chronik aus Georgien.* – *Das Leben Kartlis.* Der Text gemäss aller Haupthandschriften von **S. Kauchtschischwili** bestimmt. Bd. I. Tbilisi 1955, S. 295 /in Georgisch/.

³ **Sch. Inal-ipa.** Die Probleme ethnisch-kultureller Geschichte der Abchassen. Suchumi, 1976, S. 141 /in Russisch/.

Nach Meinung von Z. Antschabadse bedeutet die alte georgische Form von Scharwaschidse wortwörtlich „Kind von Schi(a)rwaschach“.¹

Wie wir sehen, verfügt die gegenwärtige Geschichtswissenschaft über keine klare Antwort auf die Frage nach der Herkunft des Geschlechts der Scharwaschidse, obwohl völlig klar ist, dass es sich im späten Mittelalter bezüglich des Ethnos/Stammes eindeutig als Abchas-Apsua verstand. Das bedeutet aber keinesfalls, dass das Herrscherhaus der Scharwaschidse einen von der georgischen kulturell-politischen und staatlichen Welt abgetrennten eigenen abchasischen nationalen Staat schuf. Im Gegenteil, man kann ohne jegliche Zweifel behaupten, dass ungeachtet einer gewissen Entfremdung – die durch die Ansiedelung einer neuen Welle von Bergstämmen von bereits ansässigen Dshik-Abchasen aus dem Nordkaukasus und ihre Ansiedlung zunächst im Rahmen des Saeristavo von Abchasien und später noch südlicher hervorgerufen wurde – Abchasien im späten Mittelalter dennoch organischer Teil der allgemeingeorgischen kulturpolitischen und staatlichen Welt blieb und die Vertreter des Herrscherhauses der Scharwaschidse eindeutig zu den Angehörigen des gesamtgeorgischen gesellschaftlich politischen Systems gehörten.

Die Oberhäupter Abchasiens Scharwaschidse fühlten sich als Teil des georgischen kulturpolitischen staatlichen Gebildes und auch des georgischen gesellschaftlich politischen Gedankens des späten Mittelalters.

Am deutlichsten zeigte sich das in Verserzählung des georgischen Dichters des 17. Jahrhunderts Peschangi Chitarischwili „*Schahnawasiani*“. Wie wir aus dem Poem erfahren, entsprach

¹ **S. Antschabadse.** Aus der Geschichte des mittelalterlichen Abchasiens, S. 194; **S. Papaskiri.** Das Territorium von Abchasien in den XI-XV Jahrhunderten. – *Die Erforschung der Geschichte von Abchasien/Georgien.* Tbilisi 1999, S. 179 /in Russisch/.

Solomon Scharwaschidse im entscheidenden Moment nicht der Bitte der Königin von Odtschi, Elene Gurieli, ihr zu helfen, und erklärte dies damit, dass er den König „nicht bekämpfen könne“.¹ Völlig richtig wird in der Historiographie angemerkt, dass Wachtang V. in den Augen von Solomon Scharwaschidse nicht nur König von Kartli war, sondern auch derjenige, der auf dem Thron der Könige Georgiens saß und sein Suzerän war.²

Die abchasischen Oberhäupter achteten, obwohl sie gewissermaßen die Regeln des christlichen Lebens vergaßen, auch in dieser Zeit den Katholikos von „Abchasien“ (von Westgeorgien) und hielten ihn eindeutig für den eigenen seelischen Vater. Und das zu einer Zeit, als der Sitz des Katholikos von „Abchasien“ von Bitschwinta (Pizunda) nach Gelati verlegt wurde. Eine eindeutige Bestätigung dessen ist – wenn man so will – ein Fragment des Schwurbuches, welches Kwapu Scharwaschidse (Ende des 17. Jh./ Anfang des 18. Jh.) an den Katholikos von „Abchasien“ Davit Nemsadse schrieb: *„Wir, die Herren Scharwaschidse Kwapu und mein Bruder Kerekim, schrieben Ihnen und legten Ihnen, dem Katholikos des Nordens und Abchasien Davit (...) vor“*.³ Es sind auch andere Schwurbücher erhalten geblieben, darunter das Schwurbuch „Sapizris zigni“, das Kwapu Scharwaschidse und dessen Sohn Avtandil „dem Katholikos Herrn Grigol“ (Grigol Lortkipanidse – **S.P**) vorlegte.

¹ **Peschangi**. Schahnawasiani. Unter Redaktion von **G. Leonidse** und **S. Jordanischwili**, t. I. Tbilisi 1935, S. 73-74 /in Georgisch/; **B. Chorawa**. Beziehungen zwischen Odtschi und Abchasien in XV-XVIII Jh. Tbilisi 1996, S. 104 /in Georgisch/.

² **B. Chorawa**. Beziehungen zwischen Odtschi und Abchasien, S. 103; **S. Papaskiri**. Über historische Vergangenheit des gegenwärtigen Abchasiens, Teil. I. *Von der ältesten Zeit bis dem Jahr 1917*. Tbilisi 2004, S. 101 /in Georgisch/.

³ **S. Kakabadse**. Kirchenurkunden von westlichen Georgien, Buch I., Tbilisi 1921, S. 88 /in Georgisch/; **B. Chorawa**. Beziehungen zwischen Odtschi und Abchasien, S. 117; **S. Papaskiri**. Über historische Vergangenheit des gegenwärtigen Abchasiens, Teil. I, S. 106.

Abchasien blieb trotz Zurückwendung in Richtung Urzustand, der durch den Niedergang des allgemeinen kulturellen Niveaus der Region hervorgerufen war, in dieser Zeit dennoch im Bereich der georgischen schriftlichen Kultur und Bildung. Davon zeugen gewissermaßen die Schwurbücher und andere Urkunden offiziellen Charakters aus der „Kanzlei“ des abchasischen Oberhauptes, die in georgischer Staatssprache verfasst sind. Diese Materialien zeugen eindeutig davon, dass in dieser Zeit in Abchasien die Sprache der Staatsangelegenheiten nur das Georgische war.

Sogar in der zweiten Hälfte des 18. Jahrhunderts, als das Osmanische Reich den Druck auf Abchasien verstärkte und einige Vertreter des Herrscherhauses der Scharwaschidses zwang, den Islam anzunehmen, fiel Abchasien nicht aus dem gesamtgeorgischen Sprach- und Kulturraum heraus. Es ist kein Zufall, dass die Mehrheit der Vertreter des Geschlechts der Scharwaschidses, darunter auch diejenigen, die zwangsislamisiert wurden (z. B. Rostom, Manutschar und Surab /Zurab/ Scharwaschidse – zweite Hälfte des 18. Jh.), für die georgische Welt traditionsreiche Namen trugen. Noch mehr, georgische Namen sind auch bei den Verwandten der Abchasen, den Ubychen, anzutreffen. So hießen z. B. in der 1. Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts die Anführer der Ubychen **Levan Zanubaia**¹ (mingrelische Transkription von “Zanba”) und **Surab /Zurab/ Chamischi**.²

Der von den Oberhäuptern Abchasiens Scharwaschidses organisierte Einmarsch der Dshik-Abchasen und die Ansiedlung auf dem Territorium des historischen Odischi passte – trotz bestimmter Besonderheiten – vollständig in den Rahmen des feudalen

¹ *Akty, sobrannye Kavkazskoji archeografitscheskoji komissieji (Von der Kaukasus-Kommission erhobene Taten – später immer AKAK)*. Unter der Leitung von **A. Bershe**, Tiflis, IV., 1870, S. 426, 429, 953 /in Russisch/.

² *AKAK*, t. IX., C. I, Tiflis 1884, S. 505.

Zwistes und Bürgerkrieges. Die Vertreter des Herrscherhauses Scharwaschidses, die ihre eigenen Herrschaftsgebiete auf Kosten der Territorien von Samegrelo-Odischi ausbreiten wollten, verfolgten, wie schon bemerkt wurde, gar nicht die Schaffung eines apsua-abchasischen nationalstaatlichen Gebildes, das vom gesamtgeorgischen staatspolitischen System abgetrennt war. Ihr Hauptziel war (genauso wie bei den Dadianis von Odischi und den Oberhäuptern von Guria – die Gurielis), in ihrer georgischen politischen Laufbahn voranzukommen und führende Positionen im gesamtgeorgischen staatspolitischen Raum einzunehmen, also konnte sich das Haus der Scharwaschidses nicht abgetrennt von der georgischen staatlichen und kulturpolitischen Welt vorstellen.

Im Gegenteil, die Scharwaschidses bemühten sich mit allen Mitteln, die allererste günstige Gelegenheit dafür zu nutzen, sowohl den Platz der Dadianis als auch sogar den des Königsthrons von Imeretien zu besetzen. Davon zeugt offenkundig schon allein der Versuch von Sorech Scharwaschidse, den Thron des Odischi-Herrscherhauses Anfang 1880er Jahre einzunehmen.¹

Dass die Vertreter des Geschlechts der Scharwaschidses gar nicht beabsichtigten, am Enguri stehen zu bleiben und sie auch den Einmarsch in die zentralen Gebiete von Samegrelo planten, ist aus den Daten von Kwapu Scharwaschidse zu ersehen. Er überwand den Fluss Enguri, nahm strategisch gesehen den äußerst wichtigen Punkt Ruchi ein und verwandelte ihn faktisch in seine Residenz.² Es ist bekannt, dass Kwapu Scharwaschidse im Jahre 1704 auch in Ruchi verstarb. Bemerkenswert ist, dass im Zusammenhang mit dieser Tatsache aus Gelati speziell der Katholikos von „Apchaseti“ Grigol Lortkipanidse anreiste, der der hinterbliebenen Familie eine „Nischani“ (d. h. eine Spezialsteuer zugunsten

¹ **B. Chorawa.** Beziehungen zwischen Odischi und Abchasien, S. 114.

² **B. Chorawa.** Beziehungen zwischen Odischi und Abchasien, S. 121.

der Kirche: persönliche Gegenstände, Waffen des Verstorbenen, ausgestattetes Pferd, Leibeigene, Hab und Gut) auferlegte.¹

Als klarer Beweis dessen, dass sich die Vertreter des Fürstenhauses Scharwaschidse eindeutig der georgischen kulturpolitischen und staatlichen Welt zuordneten, kann man außer aus den oben erwähnten Schwurbüchern auch aus anderen offiziellen Dokumenten wie dem Briefnachlass von Kelesch-Bei Scharwaschidse und seiner Nachfahren Giorgi (Sapar-Bei) Scharwaschidse und Micheil Scharwaschidse sowie anderer aus ihrer Kanzlei stammenden offiziellen Dokumenten ersehen. Tatsächlich ist bekannt, dass diese Fürsten ihren offiziellen und in-offiziellen Schriftverkehr nur in georgischer Sprache führten. Man kann feststellen, dass dies selbst höhere Würdenträger der russischen Administration des Kaukasus bestätigen. Nach den Worten des russischen Generals Kozebus, der am Hof von Micheil Scharwaschidse weilte, *„ist in der Familie der Fürsten Scharwaschidse die gebrauchte Schriftsprache Georgisch“*.²

Diesbezüglich möchten wir insbesondere die von Keleschbei Scharwaschidse verfasste handschriftliche Daten hervorheben (mit Datum: 20. Mai 1806), die er seinem Neffen Sosranbeg aushändigte.³ Diese Handschrift von Keleschbei Scharwaschidse ist in verschiedenerlei Hinsicht interessant, für uns ist aber hier

¹ *Georgische Rechtsurkunden*. Texte mit Bemerkungen und Verzeichnissen von **I. Dolidse**. Tbilisi 1970, S. 670 /in Georgisch/; **B. Chorawa**. Beziehungen zwischen Odtschi und Abchasien, S. 122.

² **Sch. Tschchetia**. Zur Geschichte des Fürstentums von Abchasien, 1853-1855. – In: *Historische Mitteilungen*, Nr. 15-16, Tbilisi 1963, S. 154 /in Georgisch/. Fragmente aus dem offiziellen und inoffiziellen Briefwechsel der Scharwaschidse-Fürsten, siehe: **S. Papaskiri**. Über historische Vergangenheit des gegenwärtigen Abchasiens, Teil. I, S. 105-108, 120, 122, 126-127, 129-130, 166-170, 186.

³ *AKAK*, T. II, Tiflis 1868, S. 190 **S. Papaskiri**. Über historische Vergangenheit des gegenwärtigen Abchasiens, Teil. I, S. 129-130.

besonders wichtig, dass sie nach den Urkundenwesensnormen verfasst ist, die im mittelalterlichen Georgien ausgearbeitet waren. Außerdem ist bemerkenswert, dass die Ausstellung der besagten Daten nicht in Samursaqano erfolgte, welches mehr in das übrige Georgien integriert war, sondern im so genannten „Innern“ Abchasiens, am Hof desjenigen Fürsten, der als „rechtgläubiger Moslem“ galt. Es ist zu sehen, dass in Abchasien die Bedingungen desjenigen feudalen leibeigenschaftlichen Systems herrschten („Rigi batonqmobisa“), das für ganz Georgien allgemein charakteristisch war. All das weist klar darauf hin, dass sich diese Region trotz der sogenannten (Re-) „Barbarisierung“ Abchasiens im späten Mittelalter, welche, wie oben bereits gesagt, durch den Druck der neuen Welle der verwandten Bergstämme hervorgerufen worden war, dennoch als Teil der georgischen feudalen Welt hielt und die offizielle Sprache des Fürstentums immer georgisch blieb.

Die allgemeine georgische nationalstaatliche und kulturpolitische Mentalität des Fürstenhauses Scharwaschidse zeigte sich am deutlichsten während der Zusammenstellung eines offiziellen Dokuments – der sogenannten „Bittpunkte“ von Giorgi (Saparbei) Scharwaschidse in georgischer Sprache anlässlich Abchasiens Beitritt unter das russische Protektorat.¹ Vollkommen richtig wird in der Historiographie angemerkt, dass der Prozedur der Vorbereitung und Vorstellung der „Bittpunkte“² zweifelsohne ein

¹ Ganzer Text in der Zeitung: „*Volksausbildung*“, 31. 5. 1989 /in Georgisch/.

² Der Text „satchowari punktebi“ (Bittpunkte) wurde anfangs im russischen Außenministerium verfasst, dann ins Georgische übersetzt und als Original mit Unterschrift und Stempel von Giorgi Scharwaschidse und auch den Unterschriften der abchasischen Fürsten zusammengebunden mit dem beglaubigten russischen Text den russischen Machthabern vorgelegt (**G. Paitschadse**. Abchasien im Russischen Reich. 1810-1917 Jahre. – *Die Erforschung der Geschichte von Abchasien/Georgien*. Tbilisi 1999, S. 217 /in Russisch/.

bestimmter politischer Gedanke zugrunde lag.¹ Durch die Abfassung seines Dokuments in georgischer Sprache, gemäß dem Abchasien seine offiziellen Beziehungen mit dem russischen Staat aufnahm, zeigte der Fürst von Abchasien der russischen Seite (und der ganzen Welt) klar, welche nationalstaatliche und kulturelle Welt das abchasische Fürstentum in den internationalen Beziehungen Anfang des 19. Jahrhunderts vertrat.

Es ist anzumerken, dass die Vertreter des Hauses Scharwaschidse den Beitritt des abchasischen Fürstentums unter die Schutzherrschaft des russischen Imperiums wie üblich mit den historischen Gegebenheiten verbanden und bewiesen. So zum Beispiel schrieb der Fürst von Samursaqano, Manutschar Scharwaschidse, an den General Pawel Zizianow, dass sein Herrschaftsland historisch ein Teil des Landes der Dadianis war und dass er als Vasalle von Grigol Dadiani nach dessen Befehl das Dokument über den Beitritt unter die Schutzherrschaft Russlands unterschrieb.²

Und schließlich eines der wichtigsten Argumente dafür, dass sich das abchasische Fürstenhaus ganz klar als untrennbarer Teil der gesamtgeorgischen christlich-orthodoxen Welt verstand, ist die Tatsache, dass der letzte Fürst von Abchasien Micheil Scharwaschidse und sein Sohn Giorgi Scharwaschidse im Dom

¹ **G. Paitschadse.** Abchasien im Russischen Reich, S. 217

² *AKAK*, T. II. S. 536 (meine Hervorhebung – **S.P.**). In diesem Zusammenhang ist nicht minder wichtig, dass die Führung des russischen Imperiums während der Angliederung Abchasien (an das zaristische Russland) mit allen Mitteln Werbung für die „so genannten historischen Umstände“ machte und die historische Einheit von Abchasien und des übrigen Georgiens besonders fixierte. Davon zeugt eindeutig eine Meldung des Generals Pawel Zizianow an den Grafen A. Woronzow nach Sankt Petersburg am 27. Oktober 1803, in der er bemerkte, dass Kelesch-Bei Scharwaschidse und sein Herrschaftsgebiet im 15. Jahrhundert eine der Provinzen von Iveria war (*AKAK*, T. II, S. 463). Historisch ordnete auch noch einer der russischen Oberverwalter Georgiens, General Gudowitsch, Abchasien der georgischen christlichen Welt zu (*AKAK*, T. III., Tiflis 1869, S. 208-209).

von Mokwi beigesetzt wurden, und dass die Aufschrift in georgischer Asomtavruli-Majuskelschrift geschrieben ist. Außerdem ist zu bemerken, dass die Vertreter des Geschlechts der Scharwaschidse auch nach der Auflösung des abchasischen Fürstentums durch das russische Imperium (1864) herausfordernd unterstrichen, dass sie georgische Fürsten waren.¹

Bei der Erörterung des nationalstaatlichen und kulturpolitischen Selbstbewusstseins des Fürstenhauses Scharwaschidse kann man die Tätigkeit des Sohnes und Nachfahren des letzten Fürsten der Abchasen Micheil Scharwaschidse, des bedeutenden Vertreters der georgischen Literatur des letzten Viertels des 19. – Anfang des 20. Jahrhunderts, des Publizisten und Vertreters des öffentlichen Lebens, Giorgi Scharwaschidse, nicht unerwähnt lassen.

Giorgi Scharwaschidse ist zweifellos eine tragische Persönlichkeit. Bereits als ganz junger Mann war er der Anführer (in der Rolle des Fahnenträgers) des starken antirussischen Aufstandes seiner Landsleute (Aufstand der Abchasen von 1866), weswegen er fast sein ganzes Leben unter der Verfolgung des imperialen russischen Regimes litt. Der in den besten Traditionen der georgischen feudalen Aristokratie erzogene Giorgi Scharwaschidse hatte die Liebe und Treue sowohl zur Heimat Abchasien als auch seines großen Heimatlandes Georgien in sich aufgesogen, das er oft als Iweria bezeichnete. Darüber, dass Giorgi Scharwaschidse Gesamtgeorgien und nicht Abchasien für sein Heimatland hielt, besteht überhaupt kein Zweifel, obwohl uns das kein Recht gibt anzuzweifeln, dass er und überhaupt das Geschlecht der Scharwaschidse im späten Mittelalter gemäß der ethnischen Abstammung Abchasen sind.

¹ Aleksandre Scharwaschidse bekannten Worte: „*Ich bin kein abchasischer, sondern ein **georgischer** Fürst*“, Siehe: **N. Berdsenischwili**. Skizzen von Geschichte Georgiens. Tbilisi 1990, S. 611, VIII, Hervorhebung von mir – **S.P.**

Giorgi Scharwaschidse, der historisch-kulturell zweifellos Georgier war, war sich seiner abchasisch-ethnischen Abstammung auch sehr wohl bewusst. Ein klarer Beweis dafür ist allein schon sein dichterisches Meisterwerk „*Warada*“ (abchasisches Lied), in dem er mit ganzem Gefühl den Wunsch äußert, nicht von seinen abchasischen Wurzeln getrennt zu werden. Richtig bemerkt Simon Dshanaschia, dass nur im Schoße „*des großen Gefühls der heimatlichen Eigenschaften so ein Meisterstück geboren werden konnte wie das Lied „Warada“*) – *eine dichterische Vergegenständlichung der tiefsten Erregung*“.¹ Und dieser Abchase, grenzenlos in die Heimat Abchasien verliebt, ein glänzender Kenner seiner Region und der abchasischen Sprache,² war gleichzeitig ein wahrer Sohn seiner großen Heimat Georgien und ein Patriot mit brennendem Herzen, der keine Möglichkeit ausließ, Georgien tapfer zu verteidigen, seine nationalkulturelle Eigenheit zu schützen und den Feinden seiner großen Heimat eine gebührende Antwort zu geben. Ein klares Beispiel hierfür ist schon allein der Brief Giorgi Scharwaschidses an den Redakteur der deutschen Zeitung „*Berliner Tageblatt*“ als Antwort auf einen Artikel des Zeitungskorrespondenten Lorenz. In diesem Artikel erzählte der Korrespondent dem Leser von seinem Aufenthalt in Gagra auf Einladung des Prinzen Oldenburg. Laut Behauptung des Korrespondenten sollen Vertreter des örtlichen Hohen Standes, die die Tafel bedienten, den Mantel eines der Gäste gestohlen haben. Mit einer gewissen Abscheu schrieb Lorenz auch über Tbilisi. Er bemerkte, dass hier Menschen und Tiere im gleichen Zustand seien.

Als Antwort auf diese Schmähschrift antwortete Giorgi Scharwaschidse: „*Ja, wir sind noch nicht auf der europäischen Höhe der Zivilisation (...), und eine solche Zurückgebliebenheit*

¹ S. Dshanaschia. Giorgi Scharwaschidse. *Kulturhistorische Skizze*. – In: *Werke*, t. VI. Tbilisi 1988, S. 22 /in Georgisch/.

² S. Dshanaschia. Giorgi Scharwaschidse, S. 22.

kann uns auch Menschen der Kupferzeit ähnlich machen, aber das tut uns nicht leid und **wir finden**, dass es nicht nötig ist, sich den ganzen Plunder anzueignen (...), der irgendwelchen Fortschritt besitzt, sondern wir streben an, die Perlen, die hervorragenden Werke der Literatur und Kunst auszuwählen, **wir verfolgen** die Entdeckungen der Wissenschaft, mit einem Wort: **wir übernehmen** nur das, von dem **wir uns** Nutzen im Leben und der Gesellschaft erhoffen. So ungekünstelt **leben wir**, und wenn ein Herr Lorenz tiefer in die Lebensumstände eingedrungen wäre, hätte er alles das und vieles andere verstanden; er hätte erfahren, dass **dieses Volk**, dem gegenüber er sich abfällig verhielt, **eine hervorragende historische Vergangenheit besitzt**; dass die **georgischen Ritter**, die als Verfechter der ersten Christenheit am Kreuzzug teilnahmen, im Verlaufe von fünfzehn Jahrhunderten nicht deshalb an den Toren des Kaukasus standen (...), um sich in fremden Länder einzugraben und fremdes Hab und Gut zu rauben, sondern zur Verteidigung des Vaterlandes, zum Schutz der christlichen Kultur und der Lebensweise seiner Bürger; er hätte außerdem erfahren, dass die **Georgier** über eine äußerst **reiche alte epische Literatur verfügen**, die sich mit der Weltliteratur messen kann; er hätte erfahren, dass sich in der Hierarchie der **georgischen Könige und des Volkes ungewöhnliche Helden und Menschen von genialer Weisheit** finden lassen usw. Man könnte noch vieles sagen, **aber die goldenen Seiten der Vergangenheit eines solchen Volkes, die von den Tränen und dem Blut unserer Nation benetzt sind, kann man nicht in einer Zeitungsspalte wiedergeben. Und wahrlich, es lohnt sich nicht (...)**.¹

¹ Brief des geliebten Prinzen GM Shervashidze an die Redaktion Gaz. "Berliner Tageblatt". – Die Zeitung: *Transkaukasische Rede* ("Zakavkazckaja retsch"), №146, 1911 – In: №146, 1911. Der Text wurde angeführt durch: **S. Lekischwili**. Giorgi Scharwaschidse. Die Dokumentarische Materialien. *Kulturhistorische Skizze*. – In: *Historische Mitteilungen*, №31-32, Tbilisi 1975, S. 85-286, Hervorhebungen von mir – **S.P.** /in Georgisch/.

Aus diesem Brief ist klar ersichtlich, dass für Giorgi Scharwaschidse die Abchasen und Abchasien untrennbarer Teil der Georgier und Georgiens sind. Es ist eine einheitliche kulturpolitische und staatliche Welt. Eben auf diese einheitliche Heimat der Georgier und Abchasen ist er stolz. Deshalb begrüßte Giorgi Scharwaschidse im Jahre 1917, als sich Konturen für eine Wiederherstellung des georgischen Nationalstaates abzeichneten, mit seinem ganzen Wesen das Werden einer neuen Epoche. Diesbezüglich ist sein Brief sehr interessant, der in der Zeitung „Sakartwelo“ („Georgien“, 25./29. Juni 1917) veröffentlicht wurde: *“Es ist wahr, **unsere Heimat Iberien** durchlief vielerlei große kulturelle Erschütterungen, aber **unsere** Vergangenheit gefror zum jetzigen Zeitpunkt und uns wurden die breite Straße und das Gesetz der natürlichen Evolution gestört. Ja, **wir können** auch stolz sagen, dass, wenn **uns** nicht die Widrigkeit des Schicksals behindert hätte, **wir** in der Entwicklung heute sogar vor Europa stehen würden; denn in einer Zeit, als **uns** der Apostel Andria die Gebote Christi predigte, trugen in Europa sogar die Herzöge Büffelleder am Körper und jagten barfuß mit Lanzen in der Hand in den Wäldern. Danach **haben wir unser kulturelles Leben** durch Kriege in ständiger Auseinandersetzung bis in Königin Tamars Zeit geführt, die das goldene Zeitalter Iberiens war! Danach aber verkehrte sich das Leben der Nation. Die eingefallenen Feinde gönnten **uns** keine Ruhe, und das Volk ermüdete. Langsam erloschen der großartige geistige Besitz und das Kapital des Landes und es zerbrach das Leben in Selbstständigkeit. Die Sprache verarmte, die Moral ging **uns** verloren, **wir verloren** Hab und Gut, wir verwarfen die Ritterlichkeit und Anständigkeit und gelangten schließlich in eine Zeit, da **wir Wohlergehen** in Verrat und Feindschaft zur Heimat fanden (...). Und da, als der bewusste Teil des zerrissenen Volkes Iberiens tatenlos an den Gräbern seines vergessenen Ruhms stand, ertönte plötzlich die Stimme der Wahrheit und Freiheit. Georgien schlug die Pauke und schrie hurra, hurra!“*

Und angesichts eines solchen nationalen Erwachens töten die Ausrufe einiger Landsleute Giorgi Scharwaschidse Herz: *„Wir möchten keine Freiheit, wir suchen keine Autonomie, die Menschen der Welt sind alle eins, wir wollen, dass nur das arbeitende Volk Güte und Vergünstigungen erhält. Dafür ist es notwendig, die Herren zu enteignen und die Erde den Arbeitenden zu übergeben. Nieder mit Stand und Eigentum auf Grund und Boden usw. – bis auf eine Dorfrechnung wurde die glänzende Sonne der Befreiung und Belebung der Nation reduziert“*.¹ Es ist wirklich schwer, sich nicht für diesen großen nationalen Wagemut in der Art eines Ilia [Tschawtschawadse – **Z.P.**] zu begeistern.

Der Schmerz Giorgi Scharwaschidse als großer Patriot Georgiens, der nationale Schmerz eines ständig an Georgiens Schicksal denkenden Menschen ist glänzend in dem Gedicht *„Antwort an V. O.“* wiedergegeben, das er im Jahre 1883 in Batumi beim Lesen des Gedichts von Wachtang Orbeliani *„Amer-Imers“* (veröffentlicht in der Zeitung *„Droeba“*, №1, 1883), empfand.² In diesem Gedicht (es wurde in der Zeitung *„Droeba“* wegen des Drucks der Zensur nicht veröffentlicht) ist Giorgi Scharwaschidse auf einer Ebene mit der patriotischen Gesinnung des befreundeten Dichters und erinnert mit Herzscherz an jene Zeit, als Georgien eine Einheit war.³ Giorgi Scharwaschidse empfindet schmerzlich, dass unter den Georgiern der Einheitsgedanke verloren gegangen ist. Das Land versank in Neid und Mißgunst“.⁴

¹ **G. Scharwaschidse.** Sozialismus und Georgien. – In Zeitung: *„Georgien“*, №137-140,1917; **G. Scharwaschidse.** Werke in zwei Bänden. B. I. Kutaisi 2006, S. 306-307 /in Georgisch/, Hervorhebungen von mir – **S.P.**

² Dieses Gedicht wurde von S. Lekischwili gefunden und veröffentlicht. **S. Lekischwili.** Giorgi Scharwaschidse, S. 256-257.

³ **S. Lekischwili.** Giorgi Scharwaschidse, S. 256-257.

⁴ **S. Lekischwili.** Giorgi Scharwaschidse, S. 256-257.

Aus verständlichen Gründen nehmen wir Abstand von einer allumfassenden vollwertigen Analyse dieses hervorragenden Werkes. Dies soll die Sache von Fachleuten sein. Wichtig ist für uns hier nur, dass dieses Gedicht von Giorgi Scharwaschidse in eine Reihe mit den besten Beispielen der georgischen patriotischen Lyrik gestellt werden kann.

Die Vorstellung von Giorgi Scharwaschidse als eine georgische Persönlichkeit, als ein über die georgische Sprache, über die georgische Heimatliteratur nachdenkender und sich sorgender Mensch wird unvollständig, wenn wir eine seiner Publikationen *“Rings um die georgische Sprache“*⁵ übergehen, in der er in der Rolle eines aktiven Verteidigers der georgischen Schrifttumstradition auftritt. Ihm gefallen die grobe Übersetzung eines Wortes aus einer anderen Sprache und eine nachahmende Wiedergabe einer anderen Identität nicht. Nach Giorgi Scharwaschidse ist das Ausdruck des Strebens nach *“Entartung der Heimatsprache“*.⁶ Er ist auch sehr beunruhigt über die systemlose Zunahme von Fremdwörtern in der georgischen Sprache. Nach Meinung des Schriftstellers muss man sich Fremd- und Fachwörtern *„nur im äußersten Fall zuwenden, dann, wenn georgisch nicht genau der Inhalt des Gedankens wiedergegeben werden kann (...) ja, es ist notwendig, dass wir versuchen, unsere Sprache zu bereichern und nicht verkommen zu lassen“*.⁷ Wie wir sehen, zeigt Giorgi Scharwaschidse auch hier eine echte, Ilia [Tschawtschawadse]-ähnliche Sorge gegenüber der georgischen Literatursprache.

Zum Schluss darf man mit der Erörterung des nationalstaatlichen und kulturpolitischen Selbstbewusstseins seine Rede auf der Gründerversammlung von dem so genannten „Abchasischen

⁵ Zeitung: *“Georgien“*, №169, 1915 /in Georgisch/.

⁶ Zeitung: *“Georgien“*, №169, 1915; S. **Dshanaschia**. Giorgi Scharwaschidse, S. 20.

⁷ Zeitung: *“Georgien“*, №169, 1915; S. **Dshanaschia**. Giorgi Scharwaschidse, S. 20-21.

Volksrat“ am 8. November 1917 nicht außer Acht lassen. Auf dieser Zusammenkunft traten antigeorgisch gesinnte abchasisch-nationalistische Führer das jahrhundertealte historische georgisch-abchasische Zusammenleben mit Füßen und verbanden die Zukunft des abchasischen Volkes eindeutig mit der so genannten „*Bündnis der Bergvölker des Nordkaukasus*“. Das klar ausgeprägte antigeorgische Pathos und die Ausrichtung des „Volksrates“ riefen die Proteste georgischer politischer Persönlichkeiten hervor. Wie der durch seine separatistische Gesinnung bekannte Michail Tarnawa bemerkt, erschienen Akaki Tschchenkeli, der Abgeordnete der russischen (IV.) Duma, Mitglied des „Ozakom“ („Osobyj Zakavkazskij Komitet“/außerordentliches transkaukasisches Komitee/), des Leitungsorgans der russischen provisorischen Regierung in Transkaukasien, sowie andere Persönlichkeiten auf der Versammlung, unter anderen auch Giorgi Scharwaschidse.

Giorgi Scharwaschidse wandte sich an die Teilnehmer des „Volksrates“ in abchasischer Sprache, erklärte ihnen das Wesen der sich in Russland vollziehenden Ereignisse, gratulierte ihnen zum Herannahen der Freiheit und rief sie zur Freundschaft und Zusammenarbeit mit dem georgischen Volk auf: „*Folgt Euren älteren Brüdern, handelt und kämpft zusammen mit ihnen zur Erlangung und Erhaltung der Freiheit. Ich weiß, dass manchen solch ein Gedanke nicht gefallen wird, weil sie gen Moskau schauen, aber ich schaue – gen Tbilisi. Es gibt und gab nie einen anderen Weg für Abchasien als im festen Verbund mit Georgien und zusammen mit ihm untrennbar in Freud und Leid*“. Nach dieser Erklärung verließ der von der antigeorgischen Demarche der Mitbrüder enttäuschte Giorgi Scharwaschidse den Saal und kehrte auch nicht mehr zurück.⁸

⁸ Dieses Material wurde in der in Berlin erscheinenden georgischen Zeitung „*tetri giorgi*“ („*Weißer Giorgi*“) im Jahre 1931 abgedruckt. Zitiert aus dem Buch: **D. Tschitaia**. Abchasiens Problem in Erster Republik Georgiens. *Volksrat von Abchasien in 1917-1921*. Tbilisi 2006, S. 125-126 /in Georgisch/.

Etwa drei Monate später, am 19. Februar 1918, erschütterte ganz Georgien die aus Suchumi kommende Nachricht vom Tod des Patrioten.

Der plötzliche Tod des letzten Mohikaners des abchasischen Adelsstandes, einer wahren Stütze der georgisch-abchasischen Brüderschaft und Einigkeit war Anfang 1918, als die neu erschienenen abchasischen Anführer mit allen Mitteln versuchten, seine Heimaterde vom restlichen Georgien abzutrennen, irgendwie auch symbolisch. Das Herz des glühenden Patrioten seiner großen Heimat Georgien, der wegen seiner echten patriotischen, kompromisslosen Position mehrmals den Zorn Russlands über sich ergehen lassen musste, ertrug den Verrat der Mitbrüder nicht. Es wurde ganz offensichtlich, dass die neuen abchasischen Anführer völlig andere Ideale besaßen. Sie konnten (schon nicht mehr), und wünschten auch nicht, den Spuren von Giorgi Scharwaschidse zu folgen. Nicht dafür hatte sie „Mutter Russland“ erzogen.

Das blieb natürlich für die bedeutenden Vertreter der damaligen georgischen Gesellschaft nicht unbemerkt. In diesem Zusammenhang erklärte der bekannte Georgier Niko Tawdgiridse bei Giorgi Scharwaschidses Beisetzung: *„Wegen der lautstarken Erklärung der Freiheit für dein Volk in einer Zeit, als alle Kreise unserer Gesellschaft die Aufmerksamkeit der russischen Regierung als Gottes Gnade hielten, war es dir in deiner Heimat Abchasien lange verboten zu wohnen. Erst nach der Erlangung der eingeschränkten Rechte von 1905 war es dir möglich gewesen, hier ohne Behinderung zu leben; du bist unverzüglich in dein Land gekommen, aber was hast du hier vorgefunden? **Diese Abchasen, deren Wert die Ausländer durch dich achteten, für deren Freiheit du deine ganze großartige Karriere, dein Vermögen, deinen Reichtum geopfert hast, haben dein Ankommen noch nicht einmal bemerkt (...) sie konnten keinen Nutzen aus deiner Anwesenheit ziehen. Wenn dieser Umstand zwei Jahre zuvor noch zu erdulden war, war jetzt, in der letzten Zeit, als jede Nationalität das***

Recht des freien Aufatmens erhielt, die Unaufmerksamkeit dir gegenüber geradezu ein Verbrechen (...) welches Unrecht, was für eine Lebensironie: du hast deine schöne, einnehmende Kraft der Jugend und deine unvergleichlichen Vorzüge dafür geopfert, damit deinem kleinen, aber in deinem Leben einzigen Schatz Abchasien die Freiheit erscheinen konnte und du wärest ihm wie der biblische Simon mit deiner letzten Kraft entgegen gegangen, aber dein liebes Volk der Abchasen ist an dir vorbeigegangen, bemerkte dich nicht und folgte den mit russischer Erziehung, russischem Gedankengut und russischer Ausrichtung durchtränkten Menschen, denen du aus Angst vor Unterjochung deines Volkes dein ganzes, von allen anerkanntes Glück geopfert hast“.¹

Dies sind meine Beobachtungen über die nationalstaatliche und kulturpolitische Mentalität des Fürstenhauses Scharwaschidse. Natürlich kann das hier angeführte Material keinen Anspruch auf vollständige und erschöpfende Erörterung besitzen, obwohl auch schon durch diese wenigen Andeutungen sehr klar wird, dass die Vertreter des Geschlechtes Scharwaschidse während des gesamten Mittelalters und auch später (bis zur Auflösung des abchasischen Fürstentums und selbst danach) eindeutig eine gesamtgeorgische nationalstaatliche und kulturpolitische Welt verkörperten und sich für einen untrennbaren Teil der georgischen politischen Elite hielten.

¹ Zeitschrift: „*Theater und Leben*“, №10, In: **G. Scharwaschidse**. Werke in zwei Bänden. B. II. Kutaisi 2006, S. 39-40 /in Georgisch/. Meine Hervorhebungen – **S.P.**

LE CATHOLICOSAT D'«ABKHAZIE» ET SON STATUT HISTORICO-JURIDIQUE*

La falsification du passé de la Géorgie/Abkhazie a joué un grand rôle dans la destruction de la fraternité et de l'unité historique géorgiennes-abkhazes. En effet, la falsification de la vérité historique a toujours été une des armes de l'arsenal idéologique du mouvement séparatiste abkhaze. Tout au long des décennies, les «pères spirituels» du séparatisme abkhaze n'ont pas ménagé leurs efforts pour «extirper» de la mémoire des Abkhazes la conscience de l'unité historique géorgienne-abkhaze. On imposait aux Abkhazes des «théories» complètement fausses et privées de fondements, selon lesquelles, historiquement, il n'y aurait jamais eu de rapport entre le peuple abkhaze et l'univers géorgien commun ethnoculturel et politico-étatique. De plus, selon ces «théories», le peuple géorgien aurait été à l'origine de tous les malheurs des Abkhazes. Ils culpabilisaient même les Géorgiens pour la déportation en Turquie de la plupart des Abkhazes musulmans, effectuée par la Russie tsariste dans les années 1860-1870.

C'est encore dans les années 1860 que l'Empire russe a élaboré un programme «étatique» de destruction de l'unité culturelle et historique géorgienne-abkhaze. Le premier pas fait par l'Empire dans cette orientation a été la création de l'écriture abkhaze à la base de la graphie russe, ce qui, comme le reconnaissait le créateur même de cet alphabet, le général Pierre Uslar, avait comme objectif la séparation des Abkhazes de l'univers culturel géorgien et leur

* D'abord publié dans: *Fondements historiques et ancrages culturels des langues*. Serie monographique en sciences Humaines 20. Sous la direction de **Ali Reguigui**, **Julie Boissonneault** et **Mzago Dokhtourichvili**. Sadbury, Ontario, Canada, 2017, p. 39-68 [https://www.academia.edu/36167633/Zurab_Papaskiri_Le].

intégration à la culture russe.¹ En même temps, la machine empirique-idéologique russe a déployé le soi-disant «front historiographique». En 1907, paraît un livre avec un titre provocatif “*L’Abkhazie n’est pas la Géorgie*” que l’on attribue à un certain L. Voronov.²

Dans les années 1920, cette formule fut reprise par les membres de «l’intelligentsia populaire abkhaze», enclins au séparatisme. C’est de cette façon que sont apparus les ouvrages à programme sur le passé historique de l’Abkhazie rédigés par Simon Basaria et Simon Ashkhatsava, les auteurs connus pour leur disposition anti-géorgienne. Ces ouvrages étaient perçus comme preuve historique de «l’indépendance étatique» de l’Abkhazie bolchévique.³ À partir des années 1950, la conjoncture politico-idéologique créée en Union soviétique a préparé un terrain fertile à la réanimation de l’idéologie séparatiste en Abkhazie. Dès lors, la question de la création de l’histoire «nationale» (non géorgienne) des Abkhazes fut de nouveau mise à l’ordre du jour. Pourtant, au début, cet objectif ne fut pas atteint. Dans *Etudes sur l’histoire de l’Abkhazie* à deux volumes, rédigés par les historiens abkhazes et géorgiens et publiés dans les années 1960-1964 sous la direction de l’historien abkhaze Georges Dzidzaria, le passé historique abkhaze était représenté dans le cadre de l’histoire géorgienne

¹ **Pierre Uslar**. Les récits anciens sur le Caucase, Recueil d’informations sur les montagnards du Caucase, Tiflis. Éditions Kavkazskoe gornoe uprovenenje, 1881, p. XXXVII [en russe]; **Djemal Gamakharia, Badri Goguia**. Abkhazie – région historique de Géorgie. Tbilissi, Éditions “*Agdgoma*”, 1997, p. 353 [En russe].

² [**L. Voronov**]. *L’Abkhazie n’est pas la Géorgie*. Moscou, Éditions “*Ver-nost*”, 1907 [En russe].

³ **Simon Bassaria**. *L’Abkhazie du point de vue géographique, ethnographique et économique*. Soukhoum-Kalé, Éditions de Narkompros de la RSS d’Abkhazie, 1923 [En russe]; **Semion Achkhatsava**. *Les voies du développement de l’histoire de l’Abkhazie*. Éditions de Narkompros d’Abkhazie, 1925 [En russe].

commune.¹

Néanmoins, dans les années 1960 à 1980, on a continué à faire des tentatives pour séparer historiquement l'Abkhazie et les Abkhazes de l'univers commun géorgien. Nous signalons plus particulièrement les publications de Chalva Inal-ipa,² de Raoul Khonelia,³ de Mikheil Gunba,⁴ d'Iouri Voronov⁵ et d'autres. De ce point de vue, la situation est particulièrement déplorable aujourd'hui car le régime séparatiste en Abkhazie attise l'hystérie anti-géorgienne dépassant toutes les limites dont le maillon central est la propagande «nationaliste-historiographique». Sur l'arène sont apparues les nouvelles «coryphées» de la «science» historique qui proposaient à leurs compatriotes de véritables «découvertes» fantaisistes. Il est à remarquer, plus particulièrement, les «chefs-d'œuvre» historiographiques d'Igor Markhoulia (Marikhoubia),⁶

¹ **Georges Dzidzaria** (dir.). Etudes sur l'histoire de l'Abkhazie. Vol. I. Soukhoumi. Éditions "Abgosizdat", 1960; vol. II, Tbilissi, Éditions "Metsniereba", 1964 [En russe].

² **Chalva Inal-ipa**. Questions de l'histoire ethnoculturelle des Abkhazes. Soukhoumi. Éditions "Alachara", 1976. [En russe].

³ **Raoul Khonelia**. Quelques questions de l'histoire politique de l'Abkhazie aux VIe-VIIIe siècles selon les données des sources arméniennes. – *Recueil d'ouvrages scientifiques des doctorants de l'Institut de langue, littérature et histoire de l'Abkhazie*. Soukhoumi, Éditions "Alachara", 1967 [En russe]; **Raoul Khonelia**. Les rapports politiques entre le royaume d'Abkhazie et le royaume des Bagratide d'Arménie aux IXe-Xe siècles. Synthèse d'une thèse de doctorat de Sciences historiques. Erevan, Éditions de l'Académie des sciences de la RSS d'Arménie, 1967 [En russe].

⁴ **Mikheil Gunba**. L'Abkhazie au premier millénaire de notre ère. Rapports socio-économiques et politiques. Soukhoumi, Éditions "Alachara", 1989 [En russe].

⁵ **Iouri Voronov**. Dans l'univers des monuments architecturaux de l'Abkhazie. Moscou, Éditions "Iskoustvo", 1978 [En russe].

⁶ **Igor Marikhoubia**. Le Caucase n'a pas été la patrie d'origine du peuple géorgien. Akua (Soukhoumi). Institut abkhaze D. Gulia des Sciences humaines, 1999 [En russe].

Aleksei Papaskir¹ et Denis Chachkhalia.² Malheureusement, les historiens-archéologues professionnels ne cèdent en rien à ces dillettantes sombres d'esprit, ignorants et insolents qui s'attribuent le titre d'historien. La preuve en est la célèbre «pasquinade»³ de Voronov et, plus particulièrement, le soi-disant *Manuel supplémentaire*⁴ d'histoire de l'Abkhazie rédigé par Oleg Bghajba et Stanislav Lakoba.

Dans l'histoire de la Géorgie/Abkhazie, il y a quelques problèmes, dont la vision séparatiste, du point de vue scientifique, qui ne tient pas debout et qui représente réellement une tentative pitoyable de créer les fondements historiographiques de l'existence

¹ **Aleksei Papaskir.** Les singes dans la littérature ancienne russe et les problèmes de l'histoire de l'Abkhazie. Soukhoumi, Éditions "Dom pechati", 2005 [En russe]; **Aleksei Papaskir.** Bagrat III et le royaume abkhaze. Université d'État d'Abkhazie, 2003 [En russe].

² **Denis Chachkhalia.** Chroniques des rois abkhazes. Moscou, Centre de recherche d'études abkhazes, 2000 [http://apsnyteka.org/255-chachkhalia_d_1.html#6], consulté le 17 octobre 2015 [En russe]; **Denis Chachkhalia.** L'école abkhaze de l'architecture byzantine (pour la question des principes de la construction de temples aux IXe-XIIIe siècles). Soukhoumi, Académie des sciences de la République d'Abkhazie, Institut abkhaze d'études humanitaires, 2011 [http://apsnyteka.org/257-chachkhalia_d_3.html], consulté le 17 octobre 2015 [En russe].

³ **Iouri Voronov.** Les Abkhazes – qui sont-ils? Gagra. Petite entreprise Adirra, 1992 [En russe]. À propos des «sagesses» jaillies dans cette publication, dans **Zurab Papaskiri.** *Mon Abkhazie. Souvenirs et réflexions.* Tbilissi, Éditions "Mériidiani", 2012, p. 241-264 [http://dspace.nplg.gov.ge/bitstream/1234/29851/1/Moia_Abkhazia.pdf], consulté le 17 octobre 2015. [En russe].

⁴ **Oleg Bghajba, Stanislav Lakoba.** Histoire de l'Abkhazie. Des temps anciens à nos jours, pour les classes de 10e-11e. Imprimé à partir des diapositifs par la firme Alasharbag, 2006 [En russe]. Le même ouvrage a été réédité en 2007. La critique de ces publications dans **Zurab Papaskiri.** L'histoire ne s'écrit pas comme ça. Quelques remarques à propos du soi-disant «manuel» d'Histoire de l'Abkhazie d'**Oleg Bghajba** et **Stanislav Lakoba**, dans **Zurab Papaskiri.** *Mon Abkhazie*, p. 321-362 [En russe].

d'un soit-disant État indépendant abkhaze. Premièrement, il y a le sujet portant sur l'ethnogenèse des Abkhazes et leur installation sur le territoire de l'Abkhazie actuelle. Selon la version des nationalistes abkhazes, ce sont les Apsuas-Abkhazes de race Abkhaze-Adighéenne qui seraient la population aborigène la plus ancienne sur le territoire de l'Abkhazie actuelle, en excluant complètement la présence, sur le même territoire, des tribus karthvelles (géorgiennes) avant le 19^e siècle. Par conséquent, le territoire de l'Abkhazie actuelle est considéré comme la patrie uniquement des Abkhazes-Apsuas, ce qui leur donnerait le droit monopoleur de décider individuellement du statut étatique de l'Abkhazie.

La spéculation n'est pas moindre lorsqu'il s'agit du soi-disant royaume «abkhaze». En se référant au nom qui vient de l'origine ethnique-tribale de Léon II, «Erithav (Prince) d'Abkhazie», fondateur de cette formation étatique, les séparatistes font tout leur possible pour faire passer pour l'État national des Abkhazes-Apsuas cette formation politico-étatique purement géorgienne.¹

¹ La critique de la vision séparatiste de l'image nationale-étatique du royaume des «Abkhazes» dans **Zurab Papaskiri**. Critique de la vision séparatiste de l'image ethnoculturelle et politico-étatique du royaume des 'Abkhazes' [en géorgien]. – *Problèmes actuels de karthvélologie (études géorgiennes)* 1, Tbilissi, Université géorgienne Andria Pirvelt-sodebuli du Patriarcat de Georgie, 2012, p. 155-172, [http://sangu.ge/images/zpapaskiri.pdf], consulte le 17/5/2015 [En géorgien]; **Zurab Papaskiri**. Pour la question de l'image nationale-étatique du royaume des 'Abkhazes', – dans *Guivi Tsulaïa – 80* (en géorgien), Tbilissi, Institut d'histoire et d'ethnologie de Georgie de l'Université d'Etat de Soukhomi, 2014, p. 151-186 [En géorgien]; **Zurab Papaskiri**. Le royaume d'«Abkhazie» – l'Etat géorgien. – *Recherches historiques* VIII-IX, Organisation de l'Abkhazie de la Société historique Ekvthime Takaishvili de Georgie, Tbilissi, Éditions "Mériidiani", 2006, p. 68-106 [http://iberiana2.wordpress.com/abkhazia/papaskiri/], consulte le 11/9/2015 [En russe]; **Zurab Papaskiri**. L'Abkhazie. L'histoire sans falsification. Deuxième édition, corrigée et complétée. Tbilissi, Éditions "Mériidiani", 2010, p. 26-51 [http://dspace.nplg.gov.ge/bitstream/1234/29865/1/AbkhaziaIstoriaBezFalsifikacii.pdf], consulte le 12/5/2015 [En russe].

C'est également la compréhension erronée du même nom qui est à la base de la déclaration dépourvue de fondement, selon laquelle le soi-disant catholicosat «abkhaze» serait une «organisation religieuse nationale abkhaze» et non pas géorgienne.

Certes, cette conclusion des chercheurs-historiens ou des ecclésiastiques abkhazes enclins au séparatisme est tellement faible et marginale qu'on pourrait se dire qu'il est tout à fait superflu d'y porter attention, mais, de fait, la question n'est pas aussi simple. Les processus destructifs ayant lieu dernièrement dans la vie ecclésiastique de l'Abkhazie occupée par la Russie, à savoir, les activités anti-canoniques sans limites des ecclésiastiques abkhazes renégats, ayant renié l'Église-mère, dont l'objectif est la séparation définitive de l'évêché de Tskhum-Abkhazie de l'Église apostolique de Géorgie et la «légalisation» de la soi-disant Église de l'«Abkhazie indépendante», ont de nouveau actualisé la question de l'appartenance nationale-étatique de l'organisation ecclésiastique appelée catholicosat d'«Abkhazie». L'actualisation de ce thème est déterminée par le fait que les séparatistes rapportent comme argument historiographique essentiel l'existence du catholicosat d'«Abkhazie», soi-disant organisation ecclésiastique nationale abkhaze.

***Les mythes au sujet du soi-disant catholicosat
d'«Abkhazie» et de l'univers chrétien
«national» abkhaze***

Avant d'analyser concrètement les étapes de la formation et du fonctionnement du catholicosat d'«Abkhazie», nous trouvons nécessaire de signaler qu'une telle démarche séparatiste des Abkhazes dans le domaine de la religion n'en est pas la première tentative. La première fois, elle a eu lieu à l'aube du mouvement séparatiste abkhaze – au mois de mars 1917. Après la restitution

de l'autocéphalie de l'Église orthodoxe géorgienne, les représentants de l'«intelligentsia populaire» abkhaze ont essayé de séparer l'Abkhazie de l'Église-mère. À ces fins, le 24-27 mai, fut organisé le «*Congrès des ecclésiastiques et des personnes civiles de la population orthodoxe abkhaze*» où on a avancé la question de la formation de l'Église autocéphale abkhaze. On a préparé un certain fondement «historiographique» présenté dans la brochure de Mikheil Tarnava, "*Bref aperçu de l'histoire de l'Église d'Abkhazie*".¹

C'est justement dans cet opus que l'on retrouve une tentative pitoyable de représenter le catholicosat d'«Abkhazie» comme une organisation ecclésiastique nationale abkhaze-apsua dont «l'Église autocéphale d'Abkhazie», détachée de l'Église géorgienne commune, devait être le successeur de droit. En même temps, l'auteur de la brochure avait évité de préciser l'appartenance ethnique des catholicos géorgiens de soi-disant «Abkhazie» (17 Hiérarques au total) et avait créé l'impression qu'ils étaient des Abkhazes ethniques.² L'objectif des chefs du régime séparatiste,³

¹ **Mikheil Tarnava.** *Bref aperçu de l'histoire de l'Église d'Abkhazie.* Soukhoumi, Édition du comité de Bzip de l'Association de la diffusion de l'éducation chez les Abkhazes, 1917 [En russe]. Voir le même aperçu dans *L'Abkhazie orthodoxe*, Moscou, 1994 [<http://anyha.org/apsua-anyha-atouryxiaazyrkjatshny/>], consulté le 15 octobre 2015 [En russe].

² **Mikheil Tarnava.** *Bref aperçu de l'histoire de l'Église d'Abkhazie*, p. 13-14. C'est à peu près dans le même style que le chercheur abkhaze contemporain Ermolaji Ajinjal essaie de dissimuler l'origine géorgienne des catholicos d'«Abkhazie», dans **Ermolaji Ajinjal.** *De l'histoire du christianisme en Abkhazie.* Soukhoumi, Édition "*Stratophil*", 2000, p. 111-135 [<https://yadi.sk/i/D2yQ9li3baRmg>], consulté le 13 octobre 2015 [En russe].

³ Chef du Ministère des Affaires étrangères de l'Abkhazie: *Tant que Ilia II considère notre pays en tant qu'une partie intégrante de la Géorgie, il lui est interdit de se rendre ici*, Agence d'informations: Les nouvelles de la Fédération, 16.06.2009 [<http://regions.ru/news/2221224/>], consulté le 13/10/2015 [En russe].

des pères¹ de «l'Église nationale abkhaze», de certains historiens² et des écrivains-philologues,³ ayant la prétention de se connaître en science historique, est la réanimation de ce mensonge.

¹ Parmi eux, il faut souligner plus particulièrement les ouvrages de Dimitri Dbar, muni de degré scientifique de Docteur en théologie de l'Académie théologique de Moscou et de l'Université Aristote de Thessalonique, président du conseil du «Saint métropolitain d'Abkhazie» créé en 2011, dans **Dimitri Dbar**. De l'histoire du catholicosat de l'Abkhazie, Univers théologique. Académie théologique de Moscou, N°4, 1997, p. 68-90 [http://apsnyteka.org/1602-dbar_iz_istorii_abkhazskogo_katholikosata.html], consulté le 13 mai 2015 [En russe]; **Dimitri Dbar**. Les tendances religieuses en Abkhazie contemporaine. Recueil d'articles, Moscou, 1999, [https://docviewer.yandex.com/ge/view/0/?*=w4kdL6DstA3%2BjFtxW3eENJ03xHd7], consulté le 13 mai 2015 [En russe]; **Dimitri Dbar**. Est-ce que l'Église de l'Abkhazie a été autocéphale? [<https://batal.livejournal.com/564322.html>], consulté le 13/5/2015 [En russe]; **Dimitri Dbar**. L'histoire du christianisme en Abkhazie au premier millénaire. Thèse de doctorat en théologie, 2001 [<https://caucasustimes.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/DbarD.pdf>], publié comme livre à part en 2005 [<http://www.slideshare.net/anyhaorg/ss-42509456>], consulté le 13/5/2015 [En russe]; **Dimitri Dbar**. Bref aperçu de l'histoire de l'Église orthodoxe de l'Abkhazie, Novij Aphon, troisième édition, corrigée et complétée, 2006 [<https://yadi.sk/i/jV4vcx65bUnxy>], consulté le 13 mai 2015 [En russe].

² **Grigorij Smir**. Évolution des croyances religieuses chez les Abkhazes. Synthèse de thèse de doctorat en sciences historiques, Institut Miklukho-Maklaï d'ethnologie et d'anthropologie, Moscou, 1997, [<http://cheloveknauka.com/evolyutsiya-religioznyh-verovaniy-u-abkhazov>], consulté le 12/5/2015 [En russe]; **Anjela Bagatelia**. L'orthodoxie en Abkhazie: les étapes essentielles de l'histoire et les particularités nationales-culturelles. Synthèse de thèse de doctorat en sciences historiques, Académie du service gouvernemental auprès du président de la Fédération de Russie, Moscou, 2002, [<http://www.dissercat.com/content/pravoslavie-v-abkhazii-osnovnye-etapy-istorii-i-natsionalno-kulturnye-osobennosti>], consulté le 15 octobre 2015 [En russe]; etc.

³ Il faut évoquer, en premier lieu, Denis Chachkhalia, dans **Denis Chachkhalia**. L'Église orthodoxe abkhaze (La chronique d'addition). Moscou, 1997 [En russe].

Ils inventent n'importe quoi pour que leurs compatriotes, qui ne connaissent pas du tout l'historiographie et qui sont plongés complètement dans le marais nationaliste-chauvin, croient à l'existence de l'univers chrétien «national» abkhaze, dont l'organisation ecclésiastique appelée catholicosat d'«Abkhazie» aurait été le porte-drapeau. Par exemple, ces derniers temps, on diffuse une opinion, selon laquelle l'Église abkhaze aurait toujours été dirigée par les évêques ethniquement Abkhazes et que la plupart des membres du clergé auraient été des Abkhazes qui auraient même mené la liturgie en abkhaze.¹

Dorotheos (Dimitri) Dbar, théologien et historien, chef du soi-disant «saint archevêché métropolitain d'Abkhazie», est le propagandiste le plus actif de cette thèse. Il rapporte, comme argument «incontestable» de cette thèse, le célèbre passage de l'ouvrage *La Vie de Konstantin*, de l'illuminateur des Slaves, Konstantin-Cyryle où, parmi les peuples qui accomplissent la liturgie dans leur langue, sont mentionnés les «Avazgs» (c'est-à-dire Abkhazes).² On

¹ **Denis Chachkhalia**. L'Église orthodoxe abkhaze; **Dimitri Dbar**. De l'histoire du catholicosat; **Grigorij Smir**. Évolution des croyances religieuses; **Georgij Amichba**. Le Moyen Âge (IVE-XVIIIe siècles), Les Abkhazes. Moscou, Édition "Naouka", 2007, p. 68, 71 [En russe].

² «Мы же роды знаемъ книги умеюще и Богу славу въздающе своимъ езыхомъ къждо. яве же суть сии: армени, перси, **авазгы**, ивери, сугди, готи, обри, турси, козари, аравляне, египти и инии мнозы» (*Паметъ и житие блаженанаго учителя нашего Константина Философа, пръваго наставника словенску узыку*. [<http://krotov.info/acts/09/3/konstan.html>], consulté le 10 octobre 2015 [En ancien russe] Il est à signaler que certains chercheurs abkhazes spéculaient avant aussi sur cette information fournie par *La Vie du philosophe Konstantin* et l'utilisait comme preuve pour affirmer qu'au Moyen Âge, les ancêtres des Abkhazes actuels auraient effectué la liturgie dans leur propre langue (apsua) (**Aleksei Papaskir**. Étude des liens littéraires et culturelles russes-abkhazes. – *Actes de l'Université d'État d'Abkhazie*, vol. VI, Soukoumi, Édition "Alachara", 1988) [En russe].

peut dire sans aucune exagération que c'est une compréhension naïve de l'information du philosophe Konstantin. Bien sûr, chez les Avazgs-Abkhazes de l'époque (depuis le 10^e siècle, au moins), la liturgie se faisait «dans leur langue», mais cette langue était le géorgien et non pas l'abkhaze actuel (l'apsua). D'ailleurs, Boris Floria, éditeur même de *La Vie de Konstantin*, le célèbre savant russe, le chercheur reconnu d'anciens monuments écrits slaves et, en général, des peuples slaves, membre-correspondant de l'Académie des sciences de Russie, le comprend bien. Selon sa définition, "*Les Abkhazes n'avaient pas leur propre alphabet et Konstantin a fait une erreur en les plaçant dans son énumération... Parmi les Abkhazes, la liturgie se faisait en géorgien. Konstantin, ne connaissant pas les langues du Caucase, pouvait croire que les Abkhazes qu'il a peut-être rencontrés pendant son voyage en Khazarie, effectuaient la liturgie dans leur langue*".¹

La tentative de D. Dbar d'appuyer sa conclusion par le fait que la propagation du christianisme entraînait la nécessité de traduire l'Évangile dans la langue du peuple donné nous paraît déplorable. En cas d'absence de l'écriture, affirme-t-il, tel ou tel peuple, créait à ces fins sa propre écriture. Cette approche du savant abkhaze est pertinente, en général. Pourtant, ceci ne veut pas dire que tous les ethnos sans exception (y compris ceux qui

¹ La mention, dans sa liste, des Abkhazes (Avazgs, dans l'original) est probablement liée avec le voyage de Konstantin en Khazarie). (*Vie de Cyrille et Methodi*; récits sur le début de l'écriture slave. Introduction, traduction et commentaires de **Boris Floria**, Moscou, Édition "Naouka", 1981 [http://www.vostlit.info/Texts/Dokumenty/Tschechien/IX/Slav_pis/frametext1.htm], consulté le 11 octobre 2015 [En russe], nous soulignons – **Z.P.**). A ce propos, voir également: **Zurab Papaskiri**. À propos d'une erreur de Dorothé (Dbar). – Dans **Zurab Papaskiri**. Mon Abkhazie, p. 482-486; **Roïn Métrévéli, Zurab Papaskiri**. La Géorgie et l'ancienne Russie au premier tiers des IX^e-X^e siècles. – *La diplomatie géorgienne*, Recueil annuel, Tbilissi, 2011, p. 61-62 [En géorgien].

s'étaient convertis au christianisme) aient forcément créé leur propre écriture, traduit l'Évangile et se soient mis à effectuer l'office divin dans leur langue maternelle. Il ne faudra pas aller loin pour chercher un exemple.

Avant la formation du royaume des «Abkhazes», en Géorgie occidentale, il existait une unité étatique non moins forte – le royaume de Lazika-Egrissi dont faisait partie le territoire de l'Abkhazie actuelle. Nous savons à coup sûr que cet État, tout au long de son existence, se trouvait, du point de vue religieux, sous la juridiction du patriarcat de Constantinople et, par conséquent, la Liturgie était effectuée en grec.¹ Il faut signaler que la population dans ce royaume était essentiellement représentée par les Lazes-Mingréliens et d'autres tribus karthvelles, mais personne n'a eu l'idée d'affirmer qu'ici, le mingrélien ait été la langue d'office divin.² La question rhétorique qui se pose est de savoir pourquoi les Lazes-Mingréliens, avec leur archevêché métropolitain de Phazis³ accueillant au moins quatre évêchés,⁴ n'aient pas pu créer leur

¹ À notre avis, il est dénué de bases objectives l'affirmation de certains chercheurs (en premier lieu celle du métropolite Anania Japaridzé), selon laquelle la Géorgie occidentale aurait été dès le début (à l'époque du royaume de Lazika-Egrissi) sous la juridiction du catholicos de Karthli (de Mtskhéta) et que la langue de liturgie aurait été non pas le grec, mais le géorgien, dans **Anania Japaridzé**. Le catholicos d'Abkhazie. Tbilissi, Maison d'édition Teknikuri universiteti, 2012 [En géorgien].

² Nous n'avons pas en vue, bien sûr, certains «intellectuels-mingréologues» qui considèrent l'Asomtavruli géorgien comme l'écriture mingrélienne (Voir: *L'effondrement du mythe du possible séparatisme en Mingrélie* [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UojelNGWUPM>], consulté le 15 octobre 2015 [En russe].

³ Qui n'était pas du type de «l'archevêché d'Anakopie» inventé par Dimi-tri Dbar mais qui avait réellement existé.

⁴ Le métropolitain de Phazis avec ses 4 évêchés (Rodopolis, Saïs-Tsaïshi, Pétra, Ziganev) couvrait de fait toute la Géorgie occidentale à

propre écriture et littérature nationales mingréliennes, tandis que «l'ancien peuple chrétien abkhaze» ait réussi à le faire pour rendre l'abkhaze (l'apsua) langue d'office divin à l'aube de son histoire.¹

Si nous admettons que dans le royaume des «Abkhazes» – dans l'État «national» abkhaze, selon les auteurs abkhazes – l'office divin se soit déroulé en abkhaze-apsua, qu'est-ce qui pourrait l'empêcher de le faire plus tard, à l'époque des rois «abkhazes»? Ou bien, qu'est-ce qui pouvait anéantir d'un coup l'écriture et l'office divin en abkhaze après l'intronisation à Kutaïssi de Bagrat Bagration? Était-il quelqu'un d'«étranger»? N'était-il pas le petit-fils d'un roi «abkhaze» tout-puissant, Georges II (922-957)? Où devait disparaître subitement, sans laisser aucune trace, «l'écriture abkhaze» qu'on aurait utilisée dans l'administration et dans l'office divin de l'État «abkhaze», selon l'affirmation de certains «intellectuels» russes omniscients, disposés contre le géorgien.² Pourquoi le monument écrit géorgien le plus ancien en Géorgie

l'exception des archevêchés de Sébastopol-Abazguie et de Nikopsie situés sur le territoire de l'Abkhazie actuelle. *Georgika*, t. IV, IIe partie. *Les informations des écrivains byzantins sur la Géorgie*. Les textes grecs avec la traduction en géorgien furent commentés et publiés par **Simon Kaukchishvili**. Tbilissi, 1952 [En géorgien]. À ce propos, voir en détails dans **Buba Kudava**. Le patriarcat de Constantinople et les centres ecclésiastiques de la Géorgie occidentale (IXe s). – *Histoires*. Mélanges pour le 60e anniversaire de **Roïn Métrévéli**. Tbilissi, 2000, p. 43-48 [En géorgien]; **Tamar Koridzé**. Histoire du catholicos d'Abkhazie. Synthèse d'une thèse de doctorat en sciences historiques. Tbilissi, 2003, p. 9-10 [En géorgien]; **Zurab Papaskiri**. Pour la chronologie de l'établissement du catholicos des «Abkhazes». – *Mélanges pour le 90e anniversaire de Shota Meskhia*. Tbilissi, 2006, p. 207-208 [En géorgien].

¹ *L'Abkhazie chrétienne*. Journal. Publication officielle du Saint Métropolitain de l'Abkhazie, N°8, 2007 [En russe].

² **Vadim Kojinov**. La vie actuelle des traditions. Réflexions sur la littérature abkhaze. – *Drujba narodov*, N°4, Moscou, Édition "Izvestia", 1977, p. 256 [En russe].

occidentale (daté par les spécialistes des 9e-10e siècles¹) a-t-il été découvert par le chercheur abkhaze, Anatoli Katsia non pas dans une région limitrophe de Karthli – en Iméréthie, mais précisément au beau milieu de l'Abkhazie actuelle – au village Msighkua du district de Goudautha?² C'est-à-dire, si les Abkhazes apprenaient aussi intensivement la doctrine du Christ dans leur langue maternelle déjà depuis le 6e siècle,³ comment s'est-il fait qu'au moment du plus haut développement politique, ils n'ont pas pu créer définitivement un terrain national au christianisme, accomplir l'office divin en langue abkhaze et créer une littérature chrétienne nationale, ce qu'ont pu faire au début du Moyen Âge les Géorgiens, les Arméniens, les Slaves, etc.? Qu'est-ce qui a contraint les chefs du royaume «abkhaze», qui avaient prétendu leur hégémonie politique dans

¹ **Valérie Silogava** (dir.) Le corpus des inscriptions lapidaires, Les inscriptions de la Géorgie occidentale (IXe-XIIIe s.), Tbilissi, Éditions "Metsniereba", 1980, p. 31-32 [En géorgien]; **Valérie Silogava**. L'épigraphique d'Abkhazie et de Mingrétie. Tbilissi, Éditions "Artanuji", 2004, p. 258-259 [En géorgien]; **Lia Akhaladzé**. Les monuments épigraphiques de l'Abkhazie. – *Recherches sur l'histoire de l'Abkhazie/Géorgie*. Tbilissi, Éditions "Metsniereba", 1999, p. 364 [En russe]; **Lia Akhaladzé**. L'épigraphique de l'Abkhazie comme source historique. I. *Les inscriptions lapidaires et murales*. Tbilissi, Éditions "Lega", 2005, p. 140-146 [En géorgien].

² **Anatoli Katsia**. Les monuments architecturaux dans la vallée de Tskuara. – *Matériaux sur l'archéologie de l'Abkhazie*. Tbilissi, Éditions "Metsniereba", 1967 [En russe].

³ Selon le point de vue développé dans le *Manuel supplémentaire d'histoire d'Abkhazie* d'Oleg Bgajba et de Stanislav Lakoba, la christianisation des Abkhazes qui fut terminée au milieu du VIe siècle, aurait été favorisée par l'affaiblissement de la barrière de langue, vu le fait qu'à cette période, «*parmi la population locale..., nombreux étaient ceux qui s'exprimaient parfaitement en grec*». En plus, selon les auteurs, ce processus était accéléré par le fait qu'à cette époque, il est vrai que la liturgie ne se déroulait pas en abkhaze, mais «il est fort possible que la prédication avait lieu en abkhaze aussi» (**Oleg Bgajba, Stanislav Lakoba**. *L'histoire de l'Abkhazie*, p. 115).

l'univers géorgien-commun, à faire du géorgien la langue de l'administration et de la liturgie chrétienne?

Nos opposants n'ont pas à ces questions, évidemment, de réponse fondée sur une analyse scientifique quelconque et sur une logique élémentaire, et il n'est pas possible qu'ils en aient une. Et pourtant, il y a longtemps que cette question est déjà résolue dans l'historiographie et, ce par l'historien abkhaze le plus compétent, Zurab Antchabadzé, qui a indiqué sans équivoque les facteurs qui ont déterminé le choix du géorgien littéraire comme langue de liturgie et d'administration étatique. Selon la conclusion judicieuse faite par Antchabadzé, «*la diffusion générale de la langue géorgienne en tant que langue d'écriture et de culture*» dans tout le royaume «des Abkhazes» avait été déterminée par le fait que dans cette unité étatique, c'était justement «*l'élément karthvel (géorgien) qui représentait la majorité de la population*» et qu'il «*occupait également une partie importante et principale du territoire*». À part cela, c'est «*l'élément karthvel (géorgien) qui s'est avéré le plus développé du point de vue socio-économique et culturel aussi*». ¹

Non moins fantasque est encore une affirmation sans fondement des écrivains-savants abkhazes, idéologues du séparatisme, selon laquelle les Abkhazes auraient créé, des 9^e aux 13^e siècles, une école d'architecture chrétienne «nationale» proprement abkhaze-apsuienne qui aurait construit des temples non seulement sur le territoire de l'Abkhazie actuelle et dans d'autres régions de Géorgie, mais également dans le Caucase du nord, et plus encore, qui aurait participé à la construction et à l'aménagement des églises de l'ancienne Russie coreligionnaire nouvellement convertie. ²

¹ **Zurab Anchabadzé.** De l'histoire de l'Abkhazie moyenâgeuse. Soukhoumi, Éditions "Abgosizdat", 1959, p. 106-107 [En russe], nous soulignons – Z.P.

² **Denis Chahckhalia.** L'école abkhaze, p. 8.

Selon l'auteur de cette «découverte géniale», D. Chachkhalia – écrivain-philologue qui s'approprie de temps à autre le métier d'historien (celui de critique d'art aussi), les œuvres des «architectes abkhazes» seraient les cathédrales de Loo et de Vessioloe (dans la contrée du Krasnodar – Fédération de Russie), l'église de Bzipi et la cathédrale de Bichvintha, les églises de Msigkhua, de Nouvelle Athènes Simon de Canaan, de Mokvi, même **les cathédrales de Guélathie et de Métékhi**.¹ À part cela, à l'école «nationale» d'architecture chrétienne abkhaze-apsuienne reviendraient les églises d'Arkhise, de Choana et de Sent construites dans l'Alanie historique (Karatchaïevo- Tcherkessie actuelle).² Pour ce qui est des monuments de la Russie de Kiev – les cathédrales de Sofia à Kiev, Novgorod et Tchernigovo, – Denis Chachkhalia estime qu'on ne peut pas les considérer directement parmi les monuments de «l'école abkhaze», **mais il est tout à fait possible d'affirmer, du point de vue scientifique, qu'on remarque dans ces monuments «les traces du style abkhaze et de l'expérience abkhaze de la construction des formes architecturales»**.³

Bien sûr, ces affirmations de D. Chachkhalia n'ont rien à voir avec l'opinion scientifique et elles ne sont que des fantaisies de nationalistes abkhazes en proie à l'esprit pathologique anti-géorgien. De même, les discussions sur la soi-disant «école abkhaze-alanienne» d'architecture chrétienne byzantine, à laquelle les auteurs⁴ du «Manuel supplémentaire» d'histoire d'Abkhazie évoqué ci-dessus attribuent péremptoirement les temples existant sur le territoire de l'Abkhazie actuelle, sont dépourvues de fondements scientifiques. Leur seul objectif est de séparer complètement la culture moyenâgeuse de la région d'Abkhazie du reste de la Géorgie.

¹ Denis Chahckhalia. L'école abkhaze, p. 8 [nous soulignons – Z.P.].

² Denis Chahckhalia. L'école abkhaze, p. 8.

³ Denis Chahckhalia. L'école abkhaze, p. 8 [nous soulignons – Z.P.].

⁴ Oleg Bgajba, Stanislav Lakoba. L'histoire, p. 137, 200.

Il est à signaler que non seulement le territoire de l'Abkhazie actuelle, mais également celui de l'Alanie-Ossétie sont parsemés d'églises-monastères chrétiens géorgiens. D'ailleurs, selon l'affirmation des Ossètes mêmes, la construction de la plupart d'entre eux auraient eu lieu à l'époque de la reine-roi Thamar. Pourtant, comme le remarquait judicieusement le célèbre chercheur des monuments anciens d'Alanie-Ossétie Voldemar Pfaff, il est inimaginable qu'on ait construit un si grand nombre d'églises-monastères uniquement du temps du règne de Thamar.¹

***La vérité historique sur l'image
nationale-étatique et culturelle-idéologique
du catholicosat d'«Abkhazie»***

Au Moyen Âge, il n'existait aucune civilisation nationale proprement abkhaze avec un style architectural et une peinture à fresques (peinture murale) abkhazes. Tout le territoire de l'Abkhazie actuelle faisait partie intégrante de l'univers chrétien géorgien-commun, et le soi-disant catholicosat d'«Abkhazie», dont la juridiction couvrait toute la Géorgie occidentale, a toujours été, historiquement, une organisation religieuse uniquement géorgienne. C'est un axiome que les idéologues du séparatisme abkhaze n'arrivent pas à s'approprier. La formation du catholicosat d'«Abkhazie» fut déterminée par l'activité politico-étatique et idéologique-culturelle des rois «abkhazes» de la Géorgie occidentale (et non abkhaze-apsua mythique) au 8^e siècle, dont l'objectif définitif était la réunification de l'univers ethnoculturel et politique géorgien et la création d'un État géorgien commun sous l'égide du trône de Kutaïssi.

¹ **Voldemar Pfaff.** Les matériaux pour l'histoire ancienne de l'Ossétie. – *Recueil de données sur les montagnards du Caucase.* Tiflis, 4^e édition, 1870, p. 31-32 [En russe].

Dans l'historiographie – non seulement dans les ouvrages scientifiques des auteurs géorgiens, mais également dans ceux d'auteurs étrangers (Vladimir Minorski, Anatoli Novoseltsev, Lev Gumiliov, Vladimir Kuznetsov, Serguei Arutinov)¹ et dans ceux d'auteurs abkhazes les plus compétents (Zurab Anchabadzé et autres), il y a longtemps qu'on a avancé des arguments convainquants pour prouver pourquoi l'unité nommée royaume des «Abkhazes», est, du point de vue national-étatique et culturel-idéologique, un État géorgien et non pas un État abkhaze (au sens actuel).

Le royaume des «Abkhazes», comme un État souverain, fut officialisé vers la fin du 8e siècle lorsque le représentant de la maison des «Éristhavs d'Abkhazie», Léon II, le neveu de Léon Ier, ayant profité de «l'affaiblissement des Grecs», leur tourna le dos (avec le soutien des Khazars) «*et s'empara de l'Abkhazie et de l'Egrissi jusqu'à Likhe*» et «*se nomma roi des Abkhazes*».² L'ancienne tradition historique géorgienne (*Les chroniques de Karthli*) met, sans aucune hésitation, cet événement en rapport avec la crise dynastique créée à la cour «royale» (de Stephanoz-Archil) de Karthli-Egrissi. Selon *Les chroniques de Karthli*, l'attribution du titre de roi à Léon II fut conditionnée par le fait que, à l'époque, «*loané était déjà mort et Djuancher déjà vieilli. Et tout de suite après, Juancher mourut également*»,³ ce qui veut dire que les chroniques géorgiennes qui sont l'unique source historique écrite, signalent nettement la légalité de l'avènement de Léon II, comme le seul héritier légitime au pouvoir de l'Egrissi-Abkhazie unifié.

¹ Voir la littérature correspondante dans **Zurab Papaskiri**. Pour la question, p. 151-154.

² *Chroniques de Karthli*. – *Histoire de Karthli*, t. 1. Le texte établi d'après tous les manuscrits essentiels par **Simon Kaukchishvili**. Tbilissi, Éditions d'État, 1955, p. 251 [En géorgien].

³ *Chroniques de Karthli*, p. 251.

Du fait que Léon II se soit attribué le titre de roi des «Abkhazes», son État, tant à l'intérieur du pays qu'à l'extérieur, était connu sous le nom de royaume des «Abkhazes» ou, tout simplement, d'«Abkhazie». Pourtant, dans certaines sources étrangères (par ex., dans l'ouvrage de l'historien arménien du 10^e siècle, Ioané Draskhanakerts), il est évoqué aussi comme roi d'«Egrissi»¹ (des «Eguers»), ce qui signifie que, à l'époque, dans les pays voisins, on connaissait assez bien le nom du pays qui fut nommé, depuis la fin du VIII^e siècle, «l'Abkhazie». Quant à la tradition historique géorgienne (Vakhushti Bagrationi), elle nous fournit une explication bien fondée pourquoi l'Egrissi historique fut nommé l'Abkhazie: *“Il y a, en général, trois noms de ce pays: le premier – Egrissi, le deuxième – Abkhazie, le troisième – Imérethie. Ce pays se nomme Egrissi à cause d'Egros, fils de Targamos à qui, parmi ses frères, il a succédé. Il porta ce nom jusqu'à la fin des Khosrovan [c'est-à-dire, de Stephanos – Archil]. Tandis qu'il se nomma Abkhazie à cause de Lévan, qui, après Léon 1^{er} fut Erithav en Abkhazie [...] Ainsi Léon, après le décès des Khosrovans, devint roi et s'empara de tout l'Egrissi, nomma son royaume Abkhazie et reçut le titre d'Erithav d'Egrissi aussi”*.²

Dans le royaume des Abkhazes, les tribus kartvelles (géorgiennes) représentaient la majorité ethnique. C'est encore Léon II qui divisa le royaume des «Abkhazes» en huit principautés dont seulement une, la «principauté d'Abkhazie» proprement dite (depuis l'Athon actuel vers le nord, jusqu'à Tuapsé actuel) était peuplée

¹ **Ioané Draskhanakerts**. Histoire de l'Arménie. Le texte arménien, avec une traduction en géorgien, des commentaires et des notes, fut publié par **Elené Tsagareishvili**. Tbilissi, Éditions “Metsniereba”, 1965, p. 38, 64, 109, 111, 119, 257.

² **Batonishvili Vakhushti**. Description du royaume de Géorgie. – *Histoire de Karthli*, t. IV. Le texte établi d'après tous les manuscrits essentiels par **Simon Kaukchishvili**. Tbilissi, Éditions “Sabchota Sakartvelo”, 1973, p. 742 [En géorgien].

par les tribus abkhazes.¹ La population des sept autres principautés (y compris celle de Tskhumi) était entièrement géorgienne.

La population de «Karthli», la partie est-géorgienne, dont le nombre fut considérablement augmenté vers la fin du 8e siècle, s'est avérée, par l'affirmation du chercheur abkhaze Zurab Antchabadzé, la plus développée du point de vue socio-économique et du point de vue culture.² Cette situation a déterminé le fait que c'est la langue littéraire géorgienne, qui remplissait déjà depuis longtemps la fonction de langue d'administration étatique et d'office religieux en Géorgie orientale et du sud, qui devint la langue d'État du royaume des «Abkhazes». Le fait que les rois des «Abkhazes» avaient choisi pour la capitale non pas Tsikhé-Godji – ancienne résidence des rois de Lazika-Egrissi, mais Kutaïssi, dont le développement est lié, selon la tradition historique, à l'établissement, dans cette ville, au 8e siècle, de la cour de la principauté de Karthli (Stephanoz-Archil), est également un témoignage flagrant de la croissance du poids culturel et politique de l'élément géorgien de l'Est («Karthi»). Il est tout à fait évident que les «Léonides», par le passage d'Anakophie – résidence des «Eristhavs des Abkhazes» – à Kutaïssi – résidence des «rois» de Karthli-Egrissi, ont souligné le lien direct légitime avec la maison «royale» de Stephanoz-Archil.

Dans l'historiographie, il n'y a pas d'unanimité quant à la question de l'origine ethnique-tribale de Léon II et de ses ancêtres, mais cela n'a absolument aucune importance puisque, la soi-disant dynastie «abkhaze», par son activité politique et étatique, représentait l'univers culturel-politique et étatique géorgien commun. Les rois «abkhazes» construisaient un État géorgien unifié – «Géorgie» et non une unité nationale étatique des Abkhazes-Apsuas – «Apsni».

¹ Il n'est pas exclu qu'une partie des tribus abkhazes ait habité au sein de la principauté de Tskhumi également.

² **Zurab Anchabadzé.** De l'histoire, p. 106-108.

Le fait que Léon II et ses descendants construisaient un État uniquement géorgien et non abkhaze (apsuien) fut clairement exprimé par la politique ecclésiastique des rois «abkhazes». Après avoir accédé à l'indépendance politique, les «Léonides» ont entrepris les démarches pour libérer l'Église géorgienne de sa dépendance au patriarcat de Constantinople. Il était tout à fait clair qu'il serait impossible de se libérer complètement de la sphère d'influence de Byzance sans s'être d'abord libéré des carcans religieux-idéologiques grecs-byzantins et avoir créé un fondement idéologique véritablement national.

Les Léonides ont opposé l'idéologie nationale géorgienne, incarnée par l'Église géorgienne, à l'idéologie grecque-byzantine. C'est la raison pour laquelle les rois des «Abkhazes» ont construit de nombreux monastères sur tout le territoire de la Géorgie occidentale, y créant ainsi les conditions d'implantation de la culture géorgienne écrite et de l'instruction chrétienne géorgienne. En Géorgie occidentale, y compris en Abkhazie, ce processus était accompagné de l'abolition d'anciens diocèses grecs et de l'établissement, à leur place, des cathédrales épiscopales géorgiennes. Cette politique nationale menée par les rois des «Abkhazes» a fait en sorte que, déjà au début du 10^e siècle, la Géorgie occidentale, c'est-à-dire le royaume des «Abkhazes», était entièrement devenue un pays de la culture écrite et de l'instruction géorgiennes. C'est dans ce contexte qu'a eu lieu la formation définitive de l'organisation ecclésiastique indépendante de la Géorgie occidentale – du catholicos de l'«Abkhazie».

Les sources historiques ne fournissent pas les dates précises de la séparation définitive de la Géorgie occidentale du patriarcat de Constantinople, pourtant, le matériel existant nous permet de suivre ce processus. Aujourd'hui on peut considérer comme acquis le fait que l'organisation ecclésiastique connue sous le nom de catholicos de l'«Abkhazie» n'a pu être créée qu'à

l'époque du royaume des «Abkhazes». L'information fournie par Vakhushti Bagrationi, le confirme: *“Quand Léon tourna le dos à Byzance et fut appelé roi des Abkhazes, les Grecs étaient affaiblis. À la suite de la demande du même Lévan (Léon), Byzance accorda l'indépendance à l'Église de l'Abkhazie, c'est-à-dire de la Géorgie occidentale. Le fait que le chef de l'Église fut appelé catholicos d'Abkhazie et non pas d'Egrissi ou d'Iméréthie, en témoigne”*.¹

Il n'est pas exclu que le processus de la séparation des diocèses de Géorgie de la juridiction du patriarcat de Constantinople ait déjà été entamée dans les années 744-750, lorsque «l'Erithav d'Abkhazie» attribua à l'Hiérarque de Bichvintha le titre de «catholicos d'Abkhazie», ce qui fut reconnu officiellement par le patriarche d'Antioche.² Ceci aurait dû avoir lieu dans les conditions de l'opposition à Constantinople, lorsque dans l'empire byzantin, l'iconoclasme atteignit le point culminant. «L'Erithav d'Abkhazie» en profita et tourna le dos à Byzance.³ C'est précisément dans le cadre de l'Abkhazie que les leaders politiques de l'Abkhazie, cette dernière ayant encore le statut de «principauté» (Saeristhavo), devaient mettre l'accent sur Bichvintha et l'opposer à l'archevêché de l'Abazguie (Sébastopol), meneur de la politique du patriarcat de Constantinople, puisqu'il est fortement douteux

¹ **Batonishvili Vakhushti.** Description du royaume, p. 746.

² **Vakhtang Goïladzé.** Aux origines de l'Église géorgienne. Kutaïssi, Entreprise polygraphique, 1991, p. 168-175 [En géorgien]; **Anania Japaridzé.** Histoire de l'Église apostolique de Géorgie, t. II. Tbilissi, Éditions “Merani”, 1998, p. 90 [En géorgien]; **Bichiko Diasamidzé.** Le christianisme en Géorgie occidentale (1er-Xe siècles). Batumi, Université de Batumi, 2001, p. 203 [En géorgien]; **Djémal Gamakharia.** L'Abkhazie et l'orthodoxie (Ier s. – 1921). Tbilissi, Centre d'éditions “Lika”, 2005, p. 117 [En géorgien].

³ **Vakhtang Goïladzé.** Aux origines de l'Église géorgienne; **Anania Japaridzé.** Histoire de l'Église apostolique, p. 90 [En géorgien]; **Bichiko Diasamidzé.** Le christianisme en Géorgie occidentale, p. 203; **Djémal Gamakharia.** L'Abkhazie et l'orthodoxie, p. 117.

qu'après l'intégration dans l'État unifié de la Géorgie occidentale – royaume «des Abkhazes» – Bichvintha, malgré son «ancienne gloire»,⁴ ait pu concurrencer Phasis qui, comme nous l'avons déjà remarqué, était le centre du métropolitain de Lazika (en fait, de toute la Géorgie occidentale).

Il est évident pourtant qu'il était difficile de se libérer réellement de la dépendance du patriarcat de Constantinople. Une deuxième tentative a dû avoir lieu après la création du royaume «des Abkhazes» lorsque, dans le cadre de l'accession à la souveraineté politique, l'État occidental-géorgien a eu besoin d'une organisation ecclésiastique indépendante, libérée de l'influence politico-idéologique de Byzance. Il est tout à fait possible que ceci ait eu lieu vers 830, comme nous le dit une inscription rajoutée à l'une des listes tardives de *L'Histoire de Karthli* : « [...] c'est Bagrat qui a nommé et envoyé le catholicos en Abkhazie en 830 après Jésus-Christ». ⁵ Il y a lieu de croire que c'est à ce moment-là que fut déclarée l'indépendance de l'Église de la Géorgie occidentale qui ne fut pas immédiatement reconnue par le patriarcat de Constantinople puisque, à cette époque, les diocèses de la Géorgie occidentale

⁴ Il est connu dans l'historiographie que le diocèse de Bichvintha fut unanimement reconnu depuis le IV^e siècle, quand l'évêque de Bichvintha Stratophile prit part au travail du I^{er} Concile œcuménique de Nicée (réuni en 325). Voir: *Georgika*, t. IV, II^e partie. *Les informations des écrivains byzantins sur la Géorgie*. Les textes grecs avec la traduction en géorgien furent commentés et publiés par **Simon Kaukchishvili**, Tbilissi, 1961, p. 2-10.

⁵ *Histoire de Karthli des origines au dix-neuvième siècle*. Traduit en géorgien et édité par M. Brosset, membre de l'Académie impériale des sciences. Ire partie, Saint-Pétersbourg, 1849, p. 190; **Pavlé Ingorokva**, Guiorgui Merchoule, écrivain géorgien du dixième siècle. Tbilissi, Éditions "Sabchota Mtserali", 1954, p. 244 [En géorgien]; *Chroniques de Karthli*, p. 255; **Niko Berdzénishvili**. Vizirat en Géorgie féodale. *Chkondidel-Mtsignobartoukhoutsesi*. – Dans **Niko Berdzénishvili**. Questions de l'histoire de Géorgie, livre III. Tbilissi, Éditions "Metsniereba", 1966, p. 46 [En géorgien].

figuraient encore sur les listes des cathédrales épiscopales sous la juridiction du patriarcat de Constantinople.

Il faut accorder une importance décisive à ces notations pour préciser la date de la création du catholicosat «d'Abkhazie». On divise en deux groupes les listes des diocèses du patriarcat de Constantinople: les notations du premier groupe seraient rédigées aux 7^e-9^e siècles, pas plus tard que dans les années 820-829; l'établissement des notations du deuxième groupe est lié à l'époque de Léon VI (886-912), empereur de Byzance.¹ Si, dans les notations du premier groupe, paraissent plusieurs diocèses de la Géorgie occidentale – le métropolitain de Phasis (Lazika) avec 4 évêchés (de Rodopolis, Saïs-Tsaïshi, Pétra, Ziganev), qui étaient sous sa dépendance, et les archevêchés de Sébastopol (Abazguie) et de Nikopsie, – dans la notation du deuxième groupe datant de 901-907, il n'y a que l'archevêché de Sébastopol qui soit évoqué. Cela indique qu'au début du 10^e siècle, l'Église de la Géorgie occidentale ne se trouvait plus sous la juridiction du patriarcat de Constantinople.

L'historiographie est convaincante lorsqu'elle considère que ceci devait avoir eu lieu à la fin du 9^e siècle,² à la «demande des Grecs mêmes» (Vakhushti Bagrationi), c'est-à-dire avec l'accord de Constantinople. C'est justement à cette période que les rapports entre le royaume des «Abkhazes» et Byzance ont pris un caractère nettement constructif.³ Sur ce fond politique, il est tout

¹ *Georgika*, t. IV, II^e partie, p. 184; **Pavlé Ingorokva**. Guiorgui Merchoule, p. 234-242; **Buba Kudava**. Le patriarcat de Constantinople, p. 43-48; **Tamar Koridzé**. Histoire du catholicosat d'Abkhazie, p. 8-9.

² **Niko Berdzénishvili**. Vizirat en Géorgie féodale, p. 45; **Buba Kudava**. Patriarcat de Constantinople, p. 47; **Tamar Koridzé**. Histoire du catholicosat d'Abkhazie, p. 9-10; **Zurab Papaskiri**. Pour la chronologie, p. 208-210.

³ **Zurab Papaskiri**. Pour la question de la précision de l'orientation politique-étrangère du royaume d'«Abkhazie». – *Diplomatie géorgienne*.

à fait possible que Bagrat, roi des «Abkhazes», intronisé à Kutaïssi avec le soutien diplomatique et militaire de l'Empire Byzantin, ait pris une initiative diplomatique et «ait demandé» aux autorités byzantines d'agir en tant qu'intermédiaire auprès du patriarche de Constantinople pour que ce dernier reconnaisse l'indépendance de l'Église de la Géorgie occidentale. Cette conclusion est peut être renforcée par le précédent de Karthli aussi. Selon la tradition historique géorgienne, Vakhtang Gorgasali, (5e siècle), avait adressé à Constantinople une «demande» et avec l'accord des autorités politiques et religieuses de l'Empire byzantin, il parvint à établir le catholicosat et la reconnaissance de l'autocéphalie de l'Église de Karthli.¹

Depuis le 11e siècle, lorsque le roi des «Abkhazes», Bagrat III termina le processus de la formation de l'État unifié, le catholicosat d'«Abkhazie» se retrouva sous la dépendance du trône de Mtskhéta; le catholicos de Karthli reçut alors le titre de catholicos-patriarche. Aux 11e-12e siècles, on connaît peu de choses à propos des catholicos de l'«Abkhazie», mais l'existence, aux confins des 12e-13e siècles, de «deux catholicos» n'est pas mise en doute.² Depuis le 13e siècle (règne de David Narin), on remarque l'aspiration à l'indépendance du catholicos de l'«Abkhazie». Mais celui-ci n'a réussi à obtenir un statut juridique élevé et à devenir une organisation religieuse indépendante que dans les années 1470, lorsque par l'initiative des leaders de la Géorgie occidentale de cette

Annuaire, t. 6, Tbilissi, Presse de l'université de Tbilisi 1999, p. 329-330 [En géorgien].

¹ **Zurab Papaskiri**. Pour la chronologie, p. 209-210.

² Voir en détail: **Epiphané Gvénéatadzé**. Pour la question de «deux catholicos». – *Recherches historiques*, II, Annuaire. Tbilissi, Éditions «*Pirveli stmaba*», 1999, p. 72-76 [En géorgien]; **Epiphané Gvénéatadzé**. De l'histoire de la formation du royaume d'Iméréthie. Tbilissi, Éditions «*Metsniereba*», 2003, p. 38-42 [En géorgien].

époque,¹ Joachim, évêque de Tsaïche-Bedia, fut nommé catholicos de «Likhtimerethie et d'Abkhazie». Un document spécial fut rédigé – *Commandement religieux*, dans lequel le catholicosat d'«Abkazie» avait pour paroisse toute la Géorgie occidentale: Iméréthie, Gourie, Odishi, Abkhazie, Adjarie, Shavshethie et Klartjethie.²

La transformation du catholicosat d'«Abkhazie» en une organisation religieuse indépendante n'a pas du tout été un événement spécialement abkhaze (apsua) – c'était la démonstration de l'aspiration séparatiste des dirigeants de la Géorgie occidentale de l'époque – Bagrat VI et Chamadavlé Dadian-Gurieli. Ce sont eux qui ont eu besoin, pour satisfaire leurs ambitions politiques, d'avoir une Église, indépendante du patriarcat de Mtskhéta qui incarnait l'unité géorgienne.³ Pour ce qui est de l'Érithav d'Abkhazie, on n'observe pas du tout sa participation directe dans ce processus, mais il n'est pas exclu que lui aussi, comme vassal-fonctionnaire de Shavlé-Dadiani et, par son intermédiaire, du roi d'Iméréthie, ait soutenu l'initiative de ses suzerains.

¹ Bagrat, roi d'Iméréthie (un certain moment de Kartli-Iméréthie) et Grand connetable Dadian-Gurieli Chamadavlé, avec la participation directe de Michel – patriarche d'Antioche. C'était encore une tentative de la part de l'évêché d'Antioche d'intervenir activement dans la vie ecclésiastique de la Géorgie et de démontrer sa «suprématie» sur l'Église géorgienne, dans **Anton Ribakov**. Le catholicosat abkhaze de l'Église orthodoxe de Géorgie. Le problème du statut et du système canonique. – *Matériaux du XVIIIe colloque théologique annuel de l'Université humanitaire orthodoxe Saint-Tikhon*, t. I. Moscou, 2008, p. 401-406 [<http://pstgu.ru/download/1281269567.rybakov.pdf>], consulté le 10 novembre 2015 [En russe].

² *Commandement religieux*. Les documents juridiques géorgiens, v. III. Les documents juridiques religieux (XIe-XIXe siècles). Les textes annotés, commentés et publiés par **Isidoré Dolidzé**. Tbilissi, Éditions "Metsniereba", 1970, p. 221-233 [En géorgien].

³ L'évaluation de cet événement voir dans **Ivané Javakhishvili**. Histoire de la nation géorgienne. v. IV. Tbilissi, Éditions "Sabchota Sakartvelo", 1967, p. 111-114 [En géorgien].

Le fait que le «catholicosat d'Abkhazie» était une organisation ecclésiastique uniquement géorgienne), est clairement attesté dans les sources narratives ainsi que dans des matériels documentaires. En premier lieu, ce sont les monuments décrivant l'activité du catholicosat d'«Abkhazie»: *“Les grandes références du catholicosat soi-disant abkhaze” (ou bien “Références de Bichvintha”¹) et “Les grandes Références des paysans du catholicosat d'Abkhazie”*.² La seule chose qui lie l'univers abkhaze (apsuien) au catholicosat d'«Abkhazie», est que la résidence de catholicos s'est pendant longtemps trouvée à Bichvintha, sur le territoire de la principauté d'Abkhazie, habité essentiellement par les tribus abkhazes. De ce fait, l'image nationale-culturelle du catholicosat d'«Abkhazie» ne laisse aucun doute et elle était, comme nous l'avons déjà remarqué, entièrement géorgienne.³ Le fait que le centre de l'Église de la Géorgie occidentale fût à Bichvintha, illustre que les Abkhazes ethniques, à cette époque aussi (13e-15e siècles) restaient au sein de l'univers chrétien géorgien.

¹ **Sarguis Kakabadzé.** Les grandes références du catholicosat d'Abkhazie. – *Messenger historique*. Archives centrales de Géorgie, v. 2, Tflisis, 1925, p. 177-192 [En géorgien]; *Les références de Bichvintha (1525-1550)*. – *Les documents juridiques géorgiens*, v. II, Les documents juridiques laïques (Xe-XIXe siècles). Les textes annotés, commentés et publiés par **Isidoré Dolidzé**. Tbilissi, 1965, p. 176-183, 615-617 [En géorgien]. Voir la toute récente publication critique de *Références de Bichvintha* et des documents historiques annexés dans **Goneli Arakhamia**. *Références de Bichvintha*. Étude de sources. Tbilissi, Éditions “Mematiané”, 2009, p. 65-91 [En géorgien].

² **Sarguis Kakabadzé.** Les grandes sources des paysans du catholicosat d'Abkhazie. Tbilissi, Imprimerie Lossaberudzé, 1914 [En géorgien]; *Le registre des impôts du catholicosat d'Abkhazie (1621)*. – *Les documents juridiques géorgiens*, v. III. Les documents juridiques religieux (XIe-XIXe siècles). Les textes annotés, commentés et publiés par **Isidoré Dolidzé**. Tbilissi, Éditions “Metsniereba”, 1970, p. 397-437 [En géorgien].

³ **Zurab Anchabadzé.** De l'histoire, p. 242.

Du 16^e au 18^e siècles, les Abkhazes «incrédules» ont complètement anéanti les anciens lieux saints. Le catholicos d'Abkhazie fut obligé de quitter Bichvintha et de transférer le trône du catholicos à Guélathi. Furent abolis les diocèses de Dranda, Mokvi et Bedia. Malgré le passage des catholicos «d'Abkhazie» à Guélathi, Bichvintha restait quand même un centre important de la Géorgie occidentale où avaient lieu la bénédiction et la célébration d'autres rites.¹ Tous les catholicos célèbres d' «Abkhazie», sans exception, furent des Géorgiens ethniques. L'affirmation de certains auteurs (Dimitri Dbar), selon laquelle les Géorgiens n'ont occupé le trône du catholicosat d'«Abkhazie» que depuis 1390,² est dépourvue de fondement. De même, l'idée selon laquelle «l'apostasie par les Abkhazes» de la chrétienté serait provoquée par la géorgianisation complète du catholicosat d' «Abkhazie», et l'abolition des monuments chrétiens saints par les raids des Turcs-ottomans en Abkhazie, est dépourvue de fondement.³

On peut affirmer que tout ceci est lié aux changements ethno-démographiques qui se sont produits sur le territoire de l'Abkhazie actuelle au Moyen Âge tardif, notamment avec l'apparition d'une nouvelle vague de tribus montagnardes apparentées qui a provoqué une complète métamorphose de l'image culturelle-économique de la région. Dans un court laps de temps, l'Abkhazie de l'époque, d'une contrée féodale développée où prospéraient la culture chrétienne et l'instruction géorgiennes, se transforma en

¹ **Dmitri Bakradzé.** Le Caucase dans les anciens monuments chrétiens. – *Société des amateurs de l'archéologie*, livre I. Tiflis, 1875, p. 121-122 [En russe]; **Zurab Anchabadzé.** De l'histoire, p. 242, 278.

² Quand le prince d'Odishi Vamek Dadiani, après la campagne en Jikethie, avait désigné Arsène pour catholicos «*le représentant de la Géorgie occidentale*».

³ **Ieromonah Dorothé (Dbar).** Court essai de l'histoire de l'Église orthodoxe abkhaze. Novij Afon, 2005 [<http://www.abkhazia.ru/religion/>], consulté le 17 octobre 2015. [En russe].

une province arriérée avec un régime patriarcal primitif et des croyances et représentations païennes.

Les représentants de la lignée de Sharvashidzé qui gouvernaient la principauté d'Abkhazie, dans leur lutte contre les princes d'Odishi, faisaient de plus en plus souvent appel à des Jiks-Abkhazes et prenaient l'initiative de les installer en Abkhazie. Du point de vue du développement socio-économique, ces nouveaux venus différaient nettement de la population autochtone de la principauté d'Abkhazie. Si les «Abkhazes» locaux représentaient une partie de la société féodale géorgienne hautement développée avec une idéologie chrétienne géorgienne et une culture livresque, les Jiks-Abkhazes étaient une force destructrice, sortie du tréfonds de la société primitive et porteuse d'une mentalité «barbare» qui détruisait entièrement sur son chemin les valeurs matérielles et spirituelles de la société féodale développée. Ce fait fut confirmé par le patriarche de Jérusalem Dositheos qui, lors d'un séjour en Géorgie occidentale, au milieu du 17^e siècle, indiquait que «[...] les Abazgs vidèrent [...] son domaine, pillèrent les temples et les monastères: Mokvi, Khobi, Kiachi, Zugdidi et tous les pays, de Dioskurie jusqu'à Hipiusi- Tskhenistskhali et Phasis...».¹

De fait, le catholicosat d'«Abkhazie» cessa d'exister en 1795, lorsque décéda, à Kiev, le dernier catholicos Maksimé II Abachidzé. Tout au long du 19^e siècle et au début du 20^e siècle, l'Abkhazie actuelle, avec le reste de la Géorgie occidentale, faisait partie de l'exarchat de Géorgie. Malgré les tentatives sérieuses du pouvoir laïc et religieux de l'Empire russe de séparer ecclésiastiquement l'Abkhazie du reste de la Géorgie, l'Abkhazie restait au

¹ **Marie Brosset.** À propos de l'état religieux et politique de la Géorgie avant le 17^e siècle. – *La revue du Ministère de l'Éducation populaire, partie XL*, Saint-Petersbourg, 1843, p. 231 [<https://books.google.ge/books?id=3D4ZAQAIAAJ&pg=PA231&lpg=#v=onepage&q&f=false>], consulté le 17 octobre 2015 [En russe]; **Djemal Gamakharia, Badri Goguia.** L'Abkhazie, p. 264.

sein de l'exarchat de Géorgie grâce aux efforts des hommes d'action géorgiens et abkhazes qui étaient contre le séparatisme. Au mois de mars 1917, après la restitution de l'autocéphalie de l'Église orthodoxe, il y eut encore une tentative – cette fois-ci du côté des représentants de «l'intelligentsia populaire» abkhazes ayant une disposition séparatiste – de détacher l'Abkhazie de l'Église-mère. Les 24-27 mai, lors du «congrès» des représentants de la population orthodoxe et civique abkhaze, il a été décidé de restituer «l'Église indépendante, plénipotentiaire d'Abkhazie» «avec un évêque élu parmi le peuple abkhaze, muni de tous les droits de chef de l'Église indépendante abkhaze, avec tout le nécessaire pour l'établir à Soukhoum».¹ Mais cette tentative subit un échec. Plus tard, en septembre-octobre 1919, fut créé le diocèse de Tskhum-Abkhazie avec, à sa tête, le métropolite Ambrossi (Khélaïa). C'est ainsi que fut terminée une courte période d'incertitude (depuis 1917) et l'Abkhazie revint au sein de l'Église-mère.

Conclusion

Notre recherche et notre analyse nous permettent de conclure sans équivoque ce qui suit : les mythes portant sur le catholicos d' «Abkhazie» comme organisation religieuse proprement abkhaze, ne tiennent pas, du point de vue scientifique, et servent entièrement à l'assurance historiographique-idéologique de la propagande séparatiste. Le matériel rapporté dans l'article illustre sans aucun doute que, historiquement, le soi-disant catholicos d'«Abkhazie» a toujours été une organisation religieuse uniquement géorgienne dont la juridiction couvrait toute la Géorgie occidentale.

¹ *L'histoire de l'origine du christianisme en Abkhazie.* – Web-site: L'Église orthodoxe géorgienne [http://www.geo.orthodoxy.ru/history10.htm], consulté le 10 novembre 2015 [En russe].

გამომცემლობა „მერიდიანი“,
თბილისი, ალ. ყაზბეგის გამზ., №47
 239-15-22
E-mail: meridiani777@gmail.com



Zurab Papaskiri – Georgian Historian and public figure, Doctor of Historical sciences (1991), Professor of Sokhumi State University (in Tbilisi), head of the Department of Scientific Research and Development, Editor-in-Chief of the "Proceedings of Sokhumi State University" (Humanities, Social and Political Sciences Series); Chairman of the Abkhazian Organization of the Georgian Historical Society by Ekvtime Takaishvili, and Editor-in-Chief of the "Historical Researches"; owner of Order of Honour (2013); owner of the Prize of Giorgi Shervashidze (1998).

Zurab Papaskiri was born in 1950 in Zugdidi (Georgia); graduated from the Faculty of History of Tbilisi State University (1972). From 1972 to 1975, he was a post-graduate student of the Lomonosov Moscow State University. In 1978 received a PhD in History from Lomonosov Moscow State University, in 1991 the degree of Doctor of Historical Sciences (Habilitation) from Ivane Javakishvili Tbilisi State University.

Zurab Papaskiri is a prominent scholar, the sphere of his scientific interests: the history of international relations and diplomacy of medieval Georgia; Problems of the history of the regions of Georgia (Abkhazia). He is author of more than 200 scientific-research publications. The most notable monographs and books: "At the Origins of the Georgian-Russian Relations" (1982, in Russian); "Emergence of United Georgian Feudal State and Some Questions of Georgia's Foreign-Policy Status" (1990, in Georgian); "Abkhazia Is Georgia" (1998, in Georgian); "Studies in History of Present-Day Abkhazia" (Part I, 2004; Part II, 2007, in Georgian), "And Georgia Has Risen from Nikopsia to Daruband" (2009, in Georgian); "Abkhazia: Unfalsified History" (2010, in Russian); "My Abkhazia. Memoirs and Recollections" (2012, in Russian); "Georgia. Historical past and Present" (2016, in Georgian) etc.

Front Cover: The depiction of Bagrat III (978-1014), the first king of united Georgia, on the south wall of the Bediá temple.

ISBN 978-9941-25-806-0

