



KORNELI KEKELIDZE GEORGIAN NATIONAL  
CENTRE OF MANUSCRIPTS



თბილისი • TBILISI  
2024



**კორნელი კეკელიძის სახელობის საქართველოს ხელნაწერთა ეროვნული ცენტრი**  
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**International Sseasonal School  
"Abkhazia: From the Ancient Times to the Present  
(Historical-Culturological Aspects)"**

**"Travel through the History of Abkhazia"  
Scientific-Popular Brochure**



კორნელი კეკელიძის სახელობის საქართველოს ხელნაწერთა ეროვნული ცენტრი

სოხუმის სახელმწიფო უნივერსიტეტი

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## Preface

"Travel through the history of Abkhazia" ... "Travel" is a widely used call for physical or virtual travel through space, a friendly invitation to activity, encouraging the reader's engagement.

The present scientific-popular brochure has been prepared within the framework of the international seasonal school. The International Seasonal (Spring) School "**Abkhazia: From Ancient Times to the Present (Historical-Cultural Aspects)**" is a successful project of the Korneli Kekelidze National Center of Manuscripts of Georgia, implemented in collaboration with Sokhumi State University, with the support of the Shota Rustaveli National Science Foundation.

The goal of the school is to explore the history of the integral part of Georgia, its occupied territory — the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia — from ancient times to the present day, based on modern scientific standards. The school brings together scholars and experts working on the historical and cultural aspects of Abkhazia, contributing to the summarization of accumulated knowledge in the field, and familiarizing participants with the latest and ongoing research.

The present brochure contains material related to the history of Abkhazia, prepared by the academic staff of the school. In many cases, the material is presented in the form of an engaging story, guiding us through the history of Abkhazia. The brochure includes conditional modules/rubrics, which thematically group the information: Manuscript Monuments - information about the manuscript heritage related to Abkhazia; Architectural Monuments; Human Stories - dramatic episodes from the lives of historical figures of Abkhazia.

We believe that the material presented in this brochure provides valuable information for readers interested in Georgian culture and history, specifically the history of the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia.

## Abkhazia

by Zurab Papaskiri

The Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia is located between the rivers Psou and Enguri. Historically and geographically, Abkhazia is one of the regions of Georgia. Its territory has changed over time based on historical reality.

Initially, the region known as Abkhazia referred to the area north of the river Egris (present-day river Ghalidzga near Ochamchire). In the 5th-8th centuries, borders of Abkhazia began at the river Kelasur (near Sukhumi) and extended to the area of Nikopsi (modern-day Tuapse). From the 70s-80s of the 8th century, after the ruler (Eristavi) of Abkhazia expanded his power first as a duke (Mtavari), and then as the “King of the Abkhazians” over the historical region of Egrisi, the meaning of the term “Abkhazia” changed significantly. It now referred to all of western Georgia, “up to the Likh.”

After the unification of Georgia in the 11th century, Abkhazia became part of the state. It comprised all of western Georgia, and in certain cases, the term “Abkhazia” referred to the entire country of Georgia. Additionally, Abkhazia was the name of a separate administrative unit—the principality—located between Anakopia (modern-day New Athos) and Nikopsia (near modern-day Tuapse, Russia). The rest of the current territory of Abkhazia was divided between the principality of **Tskhumi** (including the municipalities of Sukhumi and Gulripshi, and part of the Ochamchire municipality) and the principality of **Bedia** (part of the Ochamchire municipality and the Gali municipality), which belonged to the ruling house of the Dadiani of Samegrelo (Odishi/Zemo Svaneti).



In the 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> centuries, through the efforts of the Shervashidze family, the principality of Abkhazia emerged from the suzerainty of the ruling Dadiani family of Samegrelo-Odishi and gradually became an independent principality. By the early 18th century, Abkhazia took on its modern territorial boundaries.

In 1864, the Russian Empire abolished the principality of Abkhazia.

The term “Abkhazia” regained its political-administrative significance after the restoration of Georgia’s independence (May 26, 1918), when the government of the Democratic Republic of Georgia recognized the status of the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia.

After the Sovietization of Georgia, in May 1921, Abkhazia was formally declared an “independent” Soviet Socialist Republic. However, in December of the same year, it was incorporated into the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic under the status of a so-called “contractual republic.” In 1931, the so-called “contractual” status of the Abkhazian SSR was abolished, and Abkhazia became the Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic of Abkhazia within the boundaries of Georgian SSR.

After the dissolution of the USSR in December 1991, Abkhazia remained within the newly independent state of Georgia as an Autonomous Republic. However, following the military conflict of 1992-1993, a separatist regime declared Abkhazia an independent republic.



Map drawn by Vakhushti Batonishvili, 18<sup>th</sup> c.

## The Etymology of «Abkhazeti»

by Sophio Kekua

The toponym **Abkhazeti** is derived from the word **Abkhaz** (the name for the people), with the addition of the suffix **-eti**, a common Georgian suffix for denoting place names. There are various theories regarding the etymology of the root word **Abkhaz** and its variant **Apsa** in Mingrelian, which is the language of the neighboring region of Samegrelo. Scholars have proposed different origins: some consider it to be of Georgian (Kartvelian) origin, others argue it is of Abkhazian, Greek, or Circassian (Cherkessian) origin. However, the issue remains unresolved. Among these theories, the only objective truth that can be established is **that the word «Abkhazia» has no relation to the modern Abkhaz (Apsua) language.** In fact, in the Abkhaz language, the term for Abkhazia is a completely different phonemic construction, **Apsnla**, which has no connection to the term «Abkhaz.»

## Tskhumi

by Sophio Kekua

Tskhumi is the ancient Georgian name for the city of Sukhumi. The toponym is believed to originate from the Kartvelian root **tskhumi**, which in the Svan language refers to the plant hardbeam (Carpinus gen.). In Old Georgian historical sources, variations of the name **tskhumi** include **tskhom** and **tskhem**. In comparison, in the Svan language, the name appears as **tskhum** // **tskhem** // **tskhem**, while in Mingrelian it is **tskhem-uri** // **tskhim-uri**. In Arabic and Turkish sources, instead of **tskhumi**, the name appears as

**Sukhmu** in Arabic and **Sukhum** in Turkish. The Turkish form **Sukhum** is considered to be the basis for the Russian form **Sukhumi**, from which the modern Georgian name **Sokhumi** is derived. In the Abkhaz language, the city of Sukhumi is called **Akva**, that is translated as “stagnant water”.

## **Dioscurias**

by Kakha Pipia

The ancient city of Dioscurias was one of the most important urban centers of Colchis. Dioscurias is first mentioned by the 4th century BC author Pseudo-Skylax of Caryanda. According to Flavius Arrian, Dioscurias was a colony of Miletus. Due to the scarcity of sources, it is difficult to determine the exact political status of the city or the precise date of its founding. Scholars generally place the founding of Dioscurias in the 7th-6th centuries BC, with some suggesting the 6th or 5th century BC as the likely period. It is hypothesized that the ancient Dioscurias was located at the confluence of the Bseti River, and it is believed to be submerged in the modern-day bay of Sukhumi. The origin of the city’s name, “Dioscurias,” is also debated. Although ancient tradition links the name of the city to the twin brothers Castor and Pollux, the Dioscuri, companions of Jason, most scholars believe that the name is a Hellenized form of a local toponym (Mengrelian *dia* (meaning “mother”) and *skuri* (meaning spring)).

The Greek population of Dioscurias was initially under the control of the Colchians, and unlike the cities of the northern Black Sea coast, where the Greek element played a leading role in all aspects of life, here the Greek settlement at the local Colchian urban center was presented by an emporion – a trading post. Between the 6th and 4th centuries BC, Dioscurias, through its Greek settlers, established intensive trade and economic contacts with the largest trading centers of the Mediterranean and the Black Sea. In

addition to international trade, Dioscurias maintained close economic relations with the local population living in the surrounding areas. It is not by chance that ancient authors (Tymosthenes, Strabo, Pliny) describe Dioscurias as the largest trading center of Hellenistic Western Caucasia, where many different tribes speaking various languages gathered, and where the Romans had to conduct their affairs through 130 translators.

### **Northwest Colchis during the Mithridatic Period**

by Kakha Pipia

From 105 to 90 BC, Colchis came under the control of King Mithridates VI of Pontus (c. 120–63 BC), whose extensive monarchy encompassed the region. Dioscurias was initially established as the residence of the Mithridatic dynasty in Colchis. One of the reasons for this choice was that the area beyond Dioscurias, inhabited by the notorious tribes of the Heniochi, Achaeans, and Zigi, was a “barbarian” space marked by raids and piracy, requiring special attention. It seems that part of the Colchian population was rebellious, as evidenced by the archaeological materials from the Eshera fortress. The fortress, built by Mithridates, appears to have been constructed hurriedly, likely in response to imminent threats of attack. This suggests how challenging it was to maintain effective control over northwest Colchis during this period.

During the Mithridatic period, Dioscurias served as the stronghold of Mithridates’ power in the region. It was under Mithridates that the polis traditions flourished here, and the city gained a certain degree of autonomy. A sign of Dioscurias’ privileged status is that, unlike other cities such as Phasis and Trapezus, it minted its own copper coins bearing its name. However, Mithridates’ favor extended primarily to the Greek population of Dioscurias, not to the local Colchis. Mithridates was hostile towards the Colchis

and, in contrast, sought to settle the Heniochi, enemies of the Colchis, around the area of Eshera. He also aimed to establish a special military settlement, a katoikia, to strengthen his control over the region.

Mithridates' policy proved successful. Dioscurias remained loyal to him until the end. Even after being ultimately defeated by the Romans, the most reliable supporters of the king turned out to be the population of Dioscurias. Despite the Romans closely pursuing him, Mithridates was able to spend the winter of 66/65 BCE peacefully in Dioscurias. The city was well-fortified and was defended by both the Pontic and Heniochian fleets. The Heniochi honored Mithridates, even when he left Dioscurias and passed through their territory on his way to the Bosporus.

### **The Manilian Law and “Upper Colchis”**

by Kakha Pipia

During the final stages of the Third Mithridatic War (74–63 BC) between Pontus and Rome, command of the Roman Eastern armies was entrusted to Gnaeus Pompeius (106–48 BC), who, in 66 BC, was granted extraordinary powers according to the Lex Manilia (Law of Manilius). Among the Asian territories that Pompeius received under this law, Plutarch (AD 46–120) mentions “Upper Colchis.” This indicates that, according to the reference, a part of Colchis, “Upper Colchis”, had already been detached from Pontic control by 66 BC. Despite the fact that ancient sources are well aware of Colchis and its people, the term “Upper Colchis” is not mentioned anywhere else. However, it is unlikely that Plutarch made any mistake or mentioned “Upper Colchis” by accident. From a purely geographical perspective, “Upper Colchis”

would have been the extreme northwestern part of Colchis. Notably, it is in this region—specifically in Eshera—that traces of large-scale military operations from this period are found. It appears that the pro-Roman Colchians, who opposed Mithridates, took control of a part of the country, “Upper Colchis,” fortified themselves in Eshera, and defied Pontic authority. Therefore, “Upper Colchis” as mentioned by Plutarch should refer to the northwestern part of modern-day Abkhazia. This further supports the notion that the borders of ancient Colchis extended at least as far as the area around Gagra and Bichvinta, and this territory was an integral part of the unified Colchian state.

## **Sebastopolis**

by Kakha Pipia

In 27 BC, the Roman vassal rulers, the Polemonids in honor of Augustus (Octavian, 27 BC – AD 14), renamed the famous in the ancient world, city of Dioscurias. The new name given to the city was “Sebastopolis“, meaning “City of Augustus” (Greek Sebastos corresponding to Latin - Augustus, meaning majestic, “sacred,” or “exalted by the gods”). The name Sebastopolis is first mentioned by Pliny the Elder (AD 23/24 – 79). During the reign of Nero (AD 54-68), a Roman garrison was stationed in Sebastopolis.

No remains of the early fortifications of Sebastopolis have been discovered so far. It is likely that, initially, the city had a temporary wooden fortification, similar to the one described by Flavius Arrian in Phasis. Later defensive structures, however, have been found along the coastline, with the oldest among them being the remains of a castellum. Only the northeastern wall of the construction has survived, with

the rest submerged underwater.

By AD 131 during Flavius Arrian's travels, Sebastopolis denoted the farthest Roman possession in the eastern Black Sea region. Unlike other Roman outposts in Colchis, Arrian notes that a cavalry unit was stationed here. He does not mention the exact amount of the garrison in Sebastopolis, but based on the size of the early castellum (0.6-0.8 hectares), it is estimated that it housed no more than 200-300 soldiers. It seems that Arrian took certain measures to strengthen the fortifications of Sebastopolis. Evidence of this is found in a limestone slab discovered in 1896 during the construction of the port in Sukhumi, with Latin inscription: HADR/ PER. FL.A/LEG. The inscription refers to construction work commissioned by Emperor Hadrian and carried out by his legate, Arrian, indicating fortification works undertaken by Arrian in Sebastopolis. By the late 2nd century, the Romans had reinforced the approaches to Sebastopolis and constructed a watchtower there.

### **An Interesting Artifact from the Village of Achmardi**

by Kakha Pipia

In 2005, during excavations in a wealthy Late Antique tomb in the village of Achmardi, located in the Gagra district, a silver cup was discovered. The cup bears a Greek inscription: Ἐγὼ Πάκουρος ὁ βασιλεὺς τοῖς ἀμνοῖς ἔδωκα – “I, King Pakoros, gave [to my] sheep.” The wording of the inscription is Eastern in style and reflects the model of the relationship between the king and his subjects: the king is the shepherd, and his lieges, subjects are the sheep. The king mentioned in the inscription, Pakoros, is a well-known ruler of the Laz, who received his power from the Roman emperor Antoninus Pius (138-161).

This inscription holds significant historical value for the history of Georgia. It is known that in 131, during the inspection journey of Flavius Arrian, the proconsul of the Roman province of Cappadocia, the northern-western border of the Laz kingdom ran along the river Egrisi (modern-day Ghalidzga). From the river Egrisi to Sebastopolis, the land was settled by the Apsils and Abazgs. Sebastopolis itself was located on the territory of the Sanigs, and its northwestern boundary extended to the river Akhient (modern-day Shakhe). Thus, during that times, the modern Gagra region fell within the settlement area of the Sanigs.

Therefore, if in 131 the border of the Laz kingdom extended only as far as the river Ghalidzga, by the middle of the 2nd century, King Pakoros already considered the tribes living to the west of the river Bzi-pi—such as the Apsils, Abazgs, and Sanigs—as his “sheep,” meaning his lieges, subjects. The inscription discovered in the village of Achmardi clearly illustrates that, within a short period, King Pakoros extended his authority to the Apsils, Abazgs, and Sanigs, and by the middle of the 2nd century, he laid the foundation for the unification of Western Georgian entity.

## **The Gothic Campaigns in Pityus**

by Kakha Pipia

Before coming into direct contact with the Roman Empire, the Goths had long been situated on the periphery of the ancient civilization. However, during the 2nd century, they began moving southward from the Baltic Sea and the Vistula River region. By the middle of the 3rd century, the Goths had established dominance along the northern Black Sea coast and began conducting widespread raids on the Danube region and the provinces of Asia Minor.



The first Gothic expedition to the Caucasian coast took place in 255/256. According to the 5th-6th century historian Zosimus, the Bosporans, fearing the invaders, allowed the barbarians to pass into Asia and even provided them with ships to cross. Zosimus collectively refers to these barbarian tribes as “Scythians,” although mentions certain Gothic tribes, including the Carpi, Boranes, and Urugundians. After entering the Black Sea, the Goths steered their course toward the Caucasian coast, eventually landing in the region of Pityus. Zosimus notes that Pityus was fortified with strong walls and had a well-organized harbor. The Roman garrison, commanded by Sucsesianus, initially defeated the barbarians in battle. However, in the autumn of 257, the Goths launched another, larger-scale expedition. This time, the Boranes were joined by the Ostrogoths. The first attack by the barbarians was directed at Phasis, but it was unsuccessful. Undeterred, the Goths then shifted their focus to Pityus. This time, they were able to capture the city, plunder it thoroughly, and destroy the Roman garrison.

The Goths took control of numerous ships in Pityus, placing prisoners who knew how to row on them and sailed to Trebizond, captured it and devastated the city.

The traces of the Gothic campaign in Pityus is clearly visible in the archaeological record. Strong signs of destruction and fire have been found across nearly the entire site of the city. Following the events of 256/257, Roman control over the eastern Black Sea region effectively collapsed, and the frontier system between Pontus and the Caucasus temporarily ceased to function.

## **The Sarmatian Raid on Sebastopolis**

by Kakha Pipia

In the 50s of the 3rd century, the coasts of Colchis and the cities of Asia Minor were severely affected by the devastating raids of the Goths. Written sources indicate that Sebastopolis managed to withstand the Gothic attack. However, later during the reign of Diocletian (284-305), the city could not avoid the invasion of the Maeotic tribes, that is evidenced by the traces of intense fire found in the cultural layers of the castellum of the Sebastopolis from the second half of the 3rd century. According to the 10th-century Byzantine emperor and historian Constantine Porphyrogenitus, in 291, the Sarmatian tribes, under the command of the Bosporan king Sauromates II, launched a large-scale expedition to the eastern Black Sea coast. They conquered the kingdom of Lazica and even invaded Asia Minor. Constantine's account makes it clear that the Sarmatian conquest of Lazica was not without resistance. Taking into account that Sauromates entered via the so-called Meotic-Colchian highway from the northern Black Sea coast, and that Pityus was already destroyed by the Goths by this time, it is likely that Sebastopolis received the first blow from the Sarmatians. This is supported by the traces of fire found in the archaeological layers of Sebastopolis, which are believed to correspond to the battles and destruction caused by the Sarmatian raids.

## The Spread of Christianity in Abkhazia

by Kakha Pipia

According to Georgian historical tradition, Western Georgia, and specifically Abkhazia, was part of the area where the first apostles of Christ were active. It is believed that the missionary work of Saint Andrew the First-Called and Saint Simon the Zealot took place here. Furthermore, Abkhazia is also known as one of the first places of exile for early Christians. One of the key factors in the spread of Christianity in the region was the presence of Roman garrisons stationed in the coastal cities of Sebastopolis and Pityus. It is known that Colchis (including Abkhazia) was under the Roman administration of Cappadocia, and the stationed garrisons were composed of legions that were under the authority of the Roman legate of Cappadocia. These included the legions XV Apollinaris (Apollo's) and XII Fulminata (Thunderous), playing an important role in the region. The XII Legion is particularly significant in Christian history due to its connections with early Christian writings and traditions. It was a legion mainly composed of Syrian Christians, noted for its strong loyalty to the true faith. The XII Legion is directly linked in Christian tradition to a famous miracle that occurred during the reign of the Emperor Marcus Aurelius (161–180). According to the legend, during a summer campaign in unbearable heat, a Roman army surrounded by barbarians was doomed to imminent death from thirst. However, miraculously, a sudden rainstorm saved the Roman army after the soldiers of the XII Legion fervently prayed for divine intervention. This legend became widely known in both pagan (Dio Cassius, Julius Capitolinus) and Christian writings, illustrating the legion's perceived sanctity.

It is likely that long presence of parts of the XII Legion in Sebastopolis and Pityus, played a crucial role in the spread of Christianity among the local population.

# The Legend of Bedia

by Tea Kartvelishvili



Gulani of Bedia, 16-17th cc

The Bedia Church dates back to the 10th century. It was built by Bagrat III, the first king of united Georgia. According to the legend, while the king was out hunting, he found a golden cross at this site, which he associated with his good fortune. As a result, he ordered the construction of the church. The name “Bedia” is derived from this fortunate event.

# The Legend of the Mokvi Church

by Tea Kartvelishvili

King Leon of the Abkhazian Kingdom decided to build a church at the confluence of the Mokvi and Dvab rivers, with a dome from which all of Abkhazia would be visible. He promised a great reward to the architect who would undertake this task.

One of the craftsmen decided to take a chance and began the construction of the church. The building

was nearly completed when King Leon decided to visit it, bringing along the promised gold and silver. He was pleased with the work, but had no intention of giving the treasure. Looking out from the dome, the king complained that, according to their agreement, the whole of Abkhazia was still not visible from the height of the church. The craftsman decided to check for himself, and climbed up to the dome. At the king's command, they took the ladder away, leaving him stranded. The craftsman finished his life atop the dome. They say that the wind scattered his body, and wherever it blew, beautiful roses began to bloom.

King Leon fulfilled his dream of having a beautiful church like Mokvi, but the craftsman was never able to built another church.



Mokvi Gospel, 1300.

### Who named Kutaisi “Kutathisi”?

by Teimuraz Gvantseladze

Archaeological excavations have confirmed that Kutaisi holds the honorable 5<sup>th</sup> place among the oldest cities in Europe. A settlement existed on this territory as early as the 15<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> centuries BC. This city was the capital of Colchis. In ancient Greek sources, the city is referred to by names such as Aia, Kuta, Kutaiā, Kutaion, Kotaion, and Kutatisium.

In ancient Georgian sources, the city is called Kutatisi, while today it is called **Kuteshi** in Mengrelian, **Kutesh** in Svans, and **Kutesh** in Abkhaz, the latter derived from Mengrelian.

The original meaning and origin of the name “Aia” are still unclear, while the other names are undoubtedly phonetic and grammatical variants of a single original name.

Abkhaz authors agree with the opinion of academician Nikolai Marr, who suggested that the variants Kuta, Kutaiā, and Kutatisium are derived from the Abkhaz word **a-kita** [exact transcription: **a-k<sup>w</sup>ta**], meaning “village”. However, Marr could not explain the other parts of the geographical name. Despite this, the scholar concluded that the name of the settlement was given by the Abkhaz, but this theory is not fully supported. The Abkhaz word for “village” (a-kwita) is believed to have been borrowed from the Turkish language, where **kit** (pronounced “**k<sup>w</sup>t**”) means “district”. The same word has been borrowed unchanged by the closely related Abaza people, living in the northern Caucasus, where they also use k<sup>w</sup>t to mean “village”. Since the Abkhaz and Abaza people did not have direct contact with the Turks until the 16th century, the word **a-k<sup>w</sup>ta** could not have existed in the Abkhaz-Abaza language during the time of the ancient Greek authors.

The Greek forms **Kuta**, **Kutaiā**, **Kutaiōn**, **Kotaiōn**, **Kutatisium**, and the Old Georgian form **Kutatisi** derive from the masculine Georgian name **Kuta**, which is still found in modern-day toponyms such as Kutauri (a village in the municipality of Shuakhevi, Adjara) and the surname **Kutashvili** (common in the Ksani region, municipality of Akhaldaba of Georgia). The form **Kutatisi** in particular includes the suffix -t-, which is a grammatical marker in Georgian indicating the plural, referring to the descendants of an ancestor.

Thus, the name of the city of Kutaisi has no connection with the Abkhaz people or their language.

## Why was the Black Sea called ‘Gorji Darya’ in Persian?

by Teimuraz Gvantseladze

In the previous story, N. Mari suggested that the ancestors of the Abkhaz-Abazins, Circassians, and Ubykhs initially lived in the territory of Western Georgia, while the ancestors of the Georgians were settled in the eastern part of present-day Turkey, north of Iraq and Syria. This assumption is based on a flawed analysis of several geographical names, which cannot withstand criticism.

Abkhaz historians uncritically share N. Mari’s hypothesis, believing that the Colchians were also their ancestors, and that the city of Kutaisi and the Kingdom of the Abkhazians (or Egrisi) were founded by them (around AD 798-978), where, supposedly, only Abkhazians lived.

“This assumption is contradicted by the fact that the Kingdom of the Abkhazians (Egrisi) is referred to in Armenian chronicles by another name, Eger-atsi ‘Egrisi’ // Ashkharh Eger-atsi ‘the land of Egrisi.’ A similar meaning is found in the geographical work *Hudud al-Alam*, *The Borders of the World* by an anonymous 10th-century Persian author, where the Black Sea is mentioned five times. In all five instances, it is called Gorji Darya - ‘the Georgian Sea,’ and not Apsua Darya ‘the Apsuar Sea,’ or Abaza Darya ‘the Abazian Sea,’ as would have been expected if only the Abkhaz-Abazians lived in present-day Western Georgia.

## **“Did Abkhazian schools exist and were Abkhazian books printed between 1938 and 1954?”**

by Teimuraz Gvantseladze

According to Abkhaz authors, between 1938 and 1954, when the Abkhaz literary language was transferred to the Georgian script, Abkhazian schools were closed in Abkhazia and the publication of books in the Abkhazian language was banned. These actions were supposedly aimed at ‘Georgianizing’ the Abkhaz people.

The facts, however, do not support these claims:

1. In reality, a true Abkhazian school never existed, neither in the past nor in the present, so the closure of Abkhazian schools was practically impossible. From the 1860s until September 1, 1945, so-called Abkhazian schools operated in Abkhazia, where the language of instruction was both Abkhazian and Russian in grades I-IV, while in higher grades, all subjects were taught in Russian. In other words, these were Russian schools with elements of the native language instruction (this is still the case today, since 1954!). In 1945, the place of the Russian language in these pseudo-Abkhazian schools was taken by the Georgian language, while Abkhazian language and literature continued to be taught in all grades. This reform was part of the broader Soviet language policy of the time. For example, in Azerbaijan, during the same period, the language of instruction in the so-called minority schools (such as in Lezgian, Rutulian, etc.) was switched from Russian to Azerbaijani...

2. In Tbilisi, in the National Library of the Parliament of Georgia and in the collection of the Sukhum Public Library, there are actually 300 titles of books and brochures published in Abkhazian between 1938 and 1954, both original and translated from Russian and Georgian: school textbooks and curricula, political, economic, and literary works, as well as the Abkhazian-Georgian dictionary... This material is



freely accessible to anyone. It is strange that even Abkhazian writers, who had their books published in their native language during 1938-1954, denied the printing of books in Abkhaz. These writers include Dmitri Gulia (whose works were published in 3 volumes in 1947-1952), Bagrat Shinkuba, Ivan Tarba...

Abkazian school textbook.  
1938



## The Abkhaz Deputation in Tbilisi

by Bezhan Khorava

During World War I (1914-1918), the Georgian people's liberation movement intensified. At the same time, the Russian authorities were considering the issue of annexing the Sokhumi District to the Black Sea Governorate and separating the Sokhumi Diocese from the Georgian Exarchate, in an attempt to detach Abkhazia from Georgia. This caused great concern among the leading circles of the Abkhaz people. In April 1916, an Abkhaz deputation arrived in Tbilisi, where they met with the Tsar's representative, Grand Duke Nikolai Romanov (1915-1917), and the Exarch of Georgia, Metropolitan Platon (Rozhdestvensky). The deputation included prominent representatives of the Abkhaz nobility: Alexander Sharvashidze, Giorgi Sharvashidze, Meliton Emukhvari, Dimitri Marshania, Astamur Inal-Ipa, Petre Anchabadze, Dimitri Margania, and Nocho Margania. As a sign that the deputation represented the will of the entire Abkhaz people, along with the nobility, representatives of the peasantry Giorgi Ezukhbaia and Anton Chukbari were also involved.

On behalf of the Abkhaz people, the deputation presented demands to the Tsar's representative and the Exarch, which called for greater attention from the government towards Abkhazia, for the Sokhumi District not to be annexed to the Black Sea Governorate, for the Sokhumi Diocese not to be separated from the Georgian Exarchate, and for the teaching of the Georgian language to be made mandatory in Abkhazian parish schools. "In the event," was stated in the demands of the deputation, "if it becomes impossible to transform the Sokhumi District into a separate governorate and it becomes necessary to annex it to another governorate, then the Sokhumi District should be united with the Kutaisi Governorate. The Sokhumi Diocese, due to its historical and current strong ties with the Georgian Church, must in no case be separated from it."

Around the same time, a letter was published in the newspaper Sakartvelo by two members of the deputation, Meliton Emukhvari and Petre Anchabadze. The authors stated: "We want an administrative and, if possible, a civil governance system that will pay special attention to the residents of the Sokhumi District. We are well aware that there are many dangers to our survival, but we are fighting by every means to preserve our existence. We are convinced that our Georgian brothers, historically and circumstantially linked to us, will support us in every way to preserve our national identity. We fully understand that unity with the Georgians will save us from many hardships, and that is why we are and will remain united with Georgian leaders in all our endeavors."

The demands of the Abkhaz society resulted in positive outcomes. The Tsarist government did not annex the Sokhumi District to the Black Sea Governorate, and the Sokhumi Diocese remained part of the Georgian Exarchate.

(There is a photo of the members of the Abkhaz deputation, taken in Tbilisi.)

## **Ilariyon the New Georgian and the Abkhazians**

by Bezhan Khorava

For many years, Father Iese (in the world, Iese Qanchaveli) was the spiritual mentor of King Solomon II of Imereti (1789-1810). He accompanied the king to Trabzon and was with him during his final days. After the king's death on February 7, 1815, Father Iese was summoned to Moscow by Queen Mariam. In Moscow, he presented a part of the Life-Giving Cross belonging to King Solomon. In 1819, Father Iese set out for Mount Athos, where in 1821, he went into a convent under the name Ilariyon at the Monastery of Dionysiou.

Priest-monk Antony (Mtatsmindeli) recounts in “The Life of Priest-Monk Ilariyon the Georgian”: “Father Ilariyon, who was on Mount Athos, was captured by the Turks in 1822 as a supporter of the rebellious Greeks and was handed over to two Turkish soldiers for execution. It turned out that the soldiers were of Abkhaz origin. When they learned that Father Ilariyon was Georgian, they were astonished and exclaimed: ‘This cannot happen, it would be disgraceful of us. We won’t even be able to show ourselves in the city; the people will say that finally, they have found a fellow countryman in this region and executed him. It will be our eternal shame.’”

They requested permission from the Pasha to release Father Ilariyon, that was successfully obtained. Afterward, Father Ilariyon continued his monastic life on Mount Athos for many years, where he passed away on February 12, 1864. By the decree of the Holy Synod of the Georgian Apostolic Church on October 17, 2002, Priest-Monk Ilariyon (Qanchaveli) was canonized and was named Ilariyon the New Georgian.

## The Last Ruler/Prince of Abkhazia

In July 1864, the Russian authorities abolished the principality of Abkhazia and introduced Russian rule. At that time, the Prince of Abkhazia, Mikhail Sharvashidze (1823-1864), was receiving treatment at the mineral springs of Tkvarcheli. The Tsar's representative, Mikhail Romanov, issued an order for strict surveillance over Mikhail Sharvashidze and for his immediate exile from Abkhazia as soon as his health improved. The prince tried to remain in Abkhazia, as he believed that leaving the region would result in his health deteriorating due to an incurable illness, especially in the harsh climate of Russia. Mikhail

Sharvashidze requested to stay in Abkhazia, and if that was not possible, he sought permission to live in Kutaisi during the winter and in Racha during the summer, with land allotted to him in the Kutaisi district and a small plot in Racha to build a summer residence.



Mikhail Sharvashidze, the Last Prince of Abkhazia, 1806-1866

In November of the same year, the Prince of Abkhazia was exiled to Stavropol, and then to Voronezh. Mikhail Sharvashidze died in Voronezh on April 16, 1866. In July, his body was brought back to Abkhazia and, according to his will, was buried in the Mokvi Church next to his wife, Alexandra (Tsutsuu) Dadiani. The inscriptions on their gravestones, written in Georgian Asomtavruli script, tell us:

‘Here lies the Princess of Abkhazia, Alexandra, daughter of Giorgi Dadiani, passed away in 1862.’

‘Here lies the Ruler/Prince of Abkhazia, Mikhail, son of Giorgi Sharvashidze, passed away in 1866.’

## The agreement between Giorgi Sharvashidze and Mamia Gurieli

by Bezhan Khorava

The son of the last Prince of Abkhazia, Mikhail Sharvashidze, Giorgi Sharvashidze (1846-1918), was a Georgian writer and public figure, and a fellow ideologue of the Tergdaleulian movement. Giorgi Sharvashidze had a close relationship with Mamia Gurieli (1836-1891), a descendant of the Gurieli princely family of Guria, to whom he was also related. Mamia Gurieli was a poet, writing under the pseudonym Fazeli. His most famous poem is 'The Man.' They shared similar views, concerns, and sorrows – connected to their homeland, Georgia.

According to the Georgian poet and public figure Ioseb Grishashvili (1889-1965), in order to fight against the Georgian collaborators with the Tsarist regime, Giorgi Sharvashidze once proposed to Mamia Gurieli: 'Let us establish a society for withholding handshakes and not giving salutations; those who show hesitation should not be given a handshake or a greeting.'

Mamia Gurieli replied: 'My dear Giorgi, in that case, it will be just you and me left. Let us fold our hands to our hearts and walk alone.'



**Giorgi Sharvashidze, son of the last  
prince of Abkhazia-Mikheil,  
1846 - 1918**

## A Tragic Love Story

by Bezhan Khorava

After the abolition of the Principality of Abkhazia (1864) and the suppression of the Abkhaz anti-Russian, anti-colonial uprising of 1866, the Russian authorities settled the family of the Ruler/Prince's brother, Alexander Sharvashidze, in the Gori district, in the village of Khovle.

In the 1870s, the populist movement spread widely in the villages of Shida Kartli. The daughters of Alexander Sharvashidze, Elizabed (Liza) and Mariam, were captivated by the ideas of the populist movement. One of the leaders of the populist movement in Georgia was Mikhail (Misho) Kipiani, the nephew of the Georgian public figure Dmitri Kipiani. According to the description by Soprom Mgaloblishvili, Misho Kipiani was eloquent, a fluent speaker, a sweet conversationalist, charming, yet straightforward, courageous, and always willing to share the troubles and concerns of his friends. In 1876, the Tsarist authorities arrested Misho Kipiani and exiled him to Orenburg. In 1881, he returned to his homeland, settled in Gori, and became a teacher at the theological seminary. He continued to spread anti-government ideas among the people, for which he was arrested again in 1883 and imprisoned in the Kutaisi prison. Along with him, Mariam Sharvashidze was also arrested. Liza Sharvashidze and her mother visited Mariam and Misho Kipiani in prison, after which the government decided to exile them to Semipalatinsk. While in prison, Liza Sharvashidze and Misho Kipiani were married. Afterward, Liza followed her husband into exile.

In 1887, Misho Kipiani was released from exile and returned to his homeland, but due to the lack of finances, without his wife and children. He planned to raise the necessary money and bring them back. In September of the same year, Liza Sharvashidze, who could not endure the harsh climate of Siberia and

constant hardship, passed away. Her death devastated Misho Kipiani. In one letter, he wrote: ‘Wherever I was, I was alone, and this is the most difficult form of torture. I was often locked up in various prisons alone, but I was never truly alone, knowing that Liza’s heart was still with me. Her kind and protective thoughts were always with me: But now? Now what am I? I am alone.’

Liza Sharvashidze’s body was brought back to Georgia and was buried in Kviskheti, in the Kipiani family’s ancestral cemetery.

## **How Mandarin appeared in Abkhazia**

by Kakha Kvashilava

This story began several thousand years ago in India, where the cultivation of the orange, juicy fruit was first started, and it was called kamalā lēbu - the ‘orange lemon’ - because of its delightful color and taste.

The marvelous tales about kamalā lēbu eventually reached the imperial palace of China, and its messengers promptly brought both the fruit and its saplings. The ruler of the underworld approved of it, and he named the fruit 橘子 ([djúdzi]) and ordered its cultivation.

However, only the nobility were allowed to taste it. Ordinary mortals could only gaze longingly at the orange fruit of the djúdzi tree, wishing to taste it, but the fear of the death penalty for such an act kept them from even attempting it.

Then, in the Middle East, the Ottomans, who had settled there, blocked the route to Asia for the Euro-

pean infidels with their conquest of Constantinople in 1453. Yes, the Europeans could still leave, but the Ottomans demanded such exorbitant amounts of money for safe passage that the Europeans, gazing helplessly at the vastness of the Atlantic Ocean from the shores of Portugal, had to endure bland meals, deprived of the spices brought from Persia, India, and China.

Eureka! The Europeans remembered that, long before Christ, Aristotle and Eratosthenes had proven that the Earth is round, and the Italian Christopher Columbus convinced the Spanish monarchs to finance his voyage to India. ‘The Earth is round, and we will reach it from the other side,’ the Italian navigator told their majesties in one or two breaths. They financed him, he set sail, and he reached... “India”.

However, years later, they discovered that ‘India’ was actually a new continent, and while gold, silver, potatoes, tomatoes, and tobacco were plentiful there, it would take many more years before the Europeans would accept the ‘golden apple’ (Italian: pomodoro) and mushrooms, the new ‘variety’ of truffles (from the Italian tartufolo, which led to the German word Kartoffel), as suitable for food.

The mandarin is ripening, but we still haven’t reached China.

After much thought, or perhaps not much at all, the Portuguese Vasco da Gama decided not to sail west, but south, and in 1499, he finally reached the real India. From then on, Europeans began traveling to Asia. It wasn’t entirely safe or cheap, but they still preferred this over

dealing with the Ottomans.

Eventually, they reached the marvelous and rich China. The Ming dynasty ruled there. At a party, during a visit with the nobility, the Portuguese ‘adventurers’ (explorer-sailors) were honored with a taste of the legendary djudzi.



Since the Chinese referred to the nobles who held government positions as 官吏 (guān lì), the Portuguese began calling them ‘mandarins.’ This term was also used in Indonesia, where the descendants of Vasco da Gama’s explorers reached China, to refer to the rulers (مرتزم menteri).

“The Portuguese also named the fruit djúzdi ‘mandarin’ and brought it to Europe. The Europeans liked this new and exotic fruit, and soon they created ‘orangeries’ (places for cultivating oranges) to grow it. The fruit became particularly popular in Louis’ France.

Soon, mandarins were taken out of the orangeries by horticulturists, and their cultivation began in open fields along the Mediterranean coast (Spain, Italy, the Ottoman Empire [Greece, the Near East]).

In the 18th century, the Germans called this fruit Mandarin Apfelsine – ‘Chinese apple’ (apple + China) or ‘Mandarino.’

In Georgia, this fruit was first brought in 1885 from Italy. However, its cultivation was unsuccessful because the imported variety turned out to be low in frost resistance, and the fruit did not ripen in time. The first attempt was unsuccessful.

In 1896, a new variety, Unshiu, was brought from Japan and planted near Batumi. Unshiu adapted well to the local climate and soon spread rapidly.

In 1901, the famous Russian millionaire, owner of gold mines and philanthropist Nikolai Vasilyevich Igumnov was exiled to the village of Alakhadze in the Kutaisi province (near Gagra, Abkhazia).

He was a co-owner of the industrial-commercial company ‘Yaroslav Great Manufactory’ (now ‘Krasny Perekop’) and the owner of gold mines in Siberia. It was he who built a magnificent palace in Moscow, on Yakimanka Street, which currently houses the French Embassy.

He was a very peculiar and scandalous figure, a ‘new Russian’ gospodin.

One day, he organized a pompous charity ball in his Yakimanka palace. In the banquet hall, where the celebration was held, the floor was covered with gold chervonets featuring the image of Emperor Nicholas II. Of course, this news reached the Imperial Court, where they were enraged (first, how could anyone desecrate the emperor’s image, and second, how could this man possess such vast wealth?). Igumnov’s property was confiscated, and he was exiled to the ‘tuzemtsy’ (aborigines) of the Caucasus.”

At that time, there were only swamps in Alakhadze. After being exiled from Moscow, Igumnov planted eucalyptus and cypress trees on his new estate, with the goal of draining the swamps. Soon, he also established a fishing enterprise, which was followed by a fish canning factory. After the swamps were fully drained, he even brought in pedigree livestock from his former estate in Yaroslavl.”

Soon, he also began gardening and grew kiwi and tobacco. He paid attention to the rapid spread of mandarins in western Georgia and, since Japan was far and the Russians no longer had friendly relations with them, he imported new varieties of this fruit from the Ottoman Empire. Some of them didn’t survive here either, but eventually, Igumnov succeeded in establishing a mandarin orchard in Alakhadze.

Since N. Igumnov still didn’t receive favor from the imperial court, the development of mandarin cultivation in Abkhazia was only possible with the help of Nikolai Nikolayevich Smetsky, the founder of the Sukhumi dendrological park. In 1916, he sent mandarins from his garden to Saint Petersburg to be presented at the 300th anniversary of the Romanov dynasty.

After the Bolshevik revolution, Igumnov, whose family had already been exiled to France, ‘voluntarily’ handed over his estate to the Soviet regime. The Bolsheviks renamed the former capitalist’s garden the ‘Soviet Citrus Farm of the Third International.’ They even employed the former ‘oppressor of peasants’ there, making him an agronomist.

In 1924, Nikolai Igumnov passed away at the age of 69. He is buried in Alakhadze.

And this is how the mandarin was introduced to Abkhazia.

### **The 41 Allegations**

Timothy K. Blauvelt

The Abkhazian officials in 1925 during the “Crisis of Ministers” in Abkhazia, which was later called the “Rif Revolt”, submitted a signed document detailing 41 enumerated specific accusations against Lakoba and those close to him, including allegations of personal corruption and protectionism by Lakoba himself and accusations against his half-brother Mikhail Lakoba and others of his relatives and associates. Aside from allegations of specific cases of corruption, such as building a large, luxurious house using bricks requisitioned from state stores and indentured peasant labor, most of the points relating to Lakoba concerned his more general approach to leadership.

Many of the accusations concerned Lakoba’s half-brother Mikhail Lakoba. Mikhail had married the daughter of a former prince, Georgy Zvanbaya, which began a trend of a new elites of insinuating themselves into the old Abkhazian aristocracy. The bride had previously been engaged to another former noble, Mikha Anchabadze, and fearing becoming the target of a blood feud, Mikhail Lakoba allegedly arrested and then shot Anchabadze under

the pretext that the latter had attempted to flee. Mikhail Lakoba then also had Anchabadze's "milk brother" Bargandzhiya arrested, brought him out from the militsiya headquarters at night and shot him. Mikhail Lakoba was accused of other uses of extrajudicial violence, including beating nearly to death a police subordinate who had declined to carry his wife's things, and executing an ethnically Greek policeman who had been arrested and "had spoken Mikhail Lakoba disrespectfully as he didn't understand why" he was being detained.

Mikhail once took a liking to a shotgun owned by a man named Beinkov in Noviy Afon, and when Beinkov failed to give it to Mikhail as a gift, Beinkov was arrested and the shotgun was "confiscated".

Mikhail Lakoba encouraged his deputy, Samson Piliya, to marry the former princess Lolua, and in order to encourage the bride's family to accept the peasant candidate Party member Piliya, described as "Nestor Lakoba's lackey and 'court jester'", Nestor Lakoba arranged a luxurious wedding for the couple. As a wedding present, Piliya was appointed as chief of the Gudauta district militsiya, in place of Evstafy Vardaniya, who was sacked as the result of the caprices of Nestor Lakoba's wife Sariya (Vardaniya's wife had failed to greet Lakoba's wife and mother with significant reverence at a public event in Gudauta, as the result of which Sariya demanded Vardaniya's removal).

There were many more such accusations against Lakoba's other relatives. When Lakoba's youngest brother Data's offer of marriage to a woman from Gudauta named Ladariya was declined, he turned to Nestor Lakoba to have her two brothers arrested, her parents' house nationalized, her relative Boris Ladariya removed from his job in the Agitprop department of the Obkom, and the whole family threatened with deportation as counterrevolutionaries. Once she was compelled to consent, her brothers were freed, the house restored, and Boris Ladariya was appointed as chairman of the Gudauta city Soviet. When the father-in-law, Aleksey Ladariya, died shortly afterwards, a grandiose wake was organized with Nestor Lakoba's approval, even though ordinarily peasants were forbidden from conducting traditional wakes.

A "tradition has emerged" in the Gudauta district, the authors averred, that before submitting any requests or

disputes to any official institution there, the peasants “should appear with their appeals to the “august” mother of Lakoba, upon whom the fate and resolution of their needs depend”.

These 41 points of accusation were signed at the end by the various Abkhaz officials, each indicating the numbers of the accusations that they were prepared to personally confirm.



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