

Languages in contact in N.W. Georgia: fact or fiction?

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"One of the most important problems of our discipline is to establish the date of the settlement of the Abkhazian population upon the territory of modern Abkhazia" -- the words of Svan linguist, Aleksandre Oniani, used to open his 2-part article **Abkhazia and NW Georgia according to the linguistic evidence**, published in *saxalxo ganatleba* (*Narodnoe Obrazovanie*) over the New Year 1989-90. Although we can all undoubtedly think of many other, rather more urgent tasks for Caucasologists in general and Kartvelologists in particular, Oniani has presented a case, and it has to be answered, however tedious this may be. Some may wish to interpose at this point the observation that the article in question was answered in the self-same paper on the 8th March by Teimuraz Gvanceladze and Merab Chuxua. But, as we shall see, what these two individuals set out to achieve can in no way be regarded as an attempt to challenge the central proposition of Oniani's argument, namely that the people we call Abkhazians have resided in Abkhazia for no more than 400-500 years. How is this conclusion reached in terms of the linguistic data?

There are three basic strings to Oniani's bow: 1. apart from the odd, insignificant example of lexical exchange, there has been no deep, long-standing influence from Abkhaz on either Mingrelian or Laz, as has been claimed by others; 2. contrary to the opinions expressed by a number of even Kartvelian scholars in the middle of this century, toponymic evidence does not support the possibility that W. Georgia was settled by NW Caucasians prior to the arrival of the Kartvelians -- indeed, Kartvelian toponyms in Abkhazia shew the territory to be a Kartvelian possession, and all the toponyms of Abkhazian provenance must have arisen over the past 400-500 years; 3. Svan is not the "mixed" (part-Kartvelian, part-NWC) language that many linguists from Marr onwards have supposed. Hence, if there is neither toponymical evidence nor any hint of Abkhaz having influenced any currently neighbouring Kartvelian language, as might have been expected from languages that have been claimed to have been in contact for at least 2,000 years, then the conclusion must be that Abkhaz has not been spoken in Abkhazia for anything like that period, for the presence in approximately their respective present-day territories (at least within Georgia) of the Kartvelian peoples over this period is beyond doubt.

Let us begin with a consideration of Svan, where one may well feel a pang of sympathy with Oniani's resentment at the apparent belittling of his native language under the soubriquet of

"mixture". Oniani's text for attack here is Simon Dzhnashia's **Svan-Adyghean (Cherkess) linguistic contacts**, which dates from that period (1942) which was characterised by what to my mind has always seemed the rather misconceived desire not merely to search for but, come what may, to find features associated with one of the Caucasian families in one or more of the others (in this case NWC features in Kartvelian) in order to 'prove' the dubious Dzhavakhishvili-Chikobavan credo of the one-time linguistic unity of all the indigenous Caucasian peoples. This drive led to a number of highly questionable explanations of probably simple Kartvelian phenomena in Svan. For example, Varlam Topuria (**Svan Verb**, pp.69-70), whilst recognising that the Svan preverb ad- is etymologically to be identified with Georgian da-, also tries to link it to an identical but in fact non-existent preverb in Abkhaz -- the Abkhaz preverb is d- not Topuria's *ad-; so the verb at the top of p.70 should be re-written wə-yə+d-t'ə-l (rather than *wy-ad-t'ə-l) 'Sit next to X!'. Topuria's suggestion that Svan an- 'hither' may be linked to Abkhaz na-, usually translated 'thither', also seems odd, though his linkage of Svan (and Mingrelian) (-) la- in the meaning of 'in(to)' looks more promising. However, Oniani does not mention Topuria at all.

Dzhnashia is said to have explained the Svan Qu-particle a as coming from Circassian a and to have ignored its genetic relation to Old Georgian a and Mingrelian o. In fact, Dzhnashia himself acknowledges the Kartvelian status of this element and then describes Kartvelian (not just Svan) a and Circassian a as genetically related. One glimpses here a hint that Oniani's methodology might not be completely honest.

Many observers have commented on one of the Svan markers of the Narrative/Ergative case, namely em, suggesting a link with the Circassian (part-)case-marker m. Oniani stresses the substantive distinction of Svan e-vowel versus Circassian lack of vowel, points out that the Circassian case in question is only used to mark definite transitive subjects as part of its functions as an oblique case-marker for definite nouns, and thus concludes: "The Ergative case, as such, does not exist in the Circassian languages" -- hence there can be no link between Svan and Circassian in this respect. Well, despite recent arguments to the contrary, I think most people still accept the relevance of ergativity to Circassian, so that, even though there may be no unique Ergative morph, we must still recognise the underlying presence of an Ergative morpheme in the language. And if we compare the citation-form with the definite Oblique case for three Kabardian nouns, namely:

<u>Nominative</u>	<u>Oblique</u>
fəz 'woman'	fəzə-m
pə 'nose'	pə-m
psə 'water'	psə-m

although we, as linguists, would place our boundary so as to isolate the nasal, would ordinary folk with a neighbourly knowledge of Circassian necessarily make the same division? I am not proposing that Svan -em MUST derive from Circassian -- it has, after all, been linked with the Georgian Narrative marker -- but we should perhaps keep a more open mind than Oniani's.

The phenomenon of "double declension", where one case-marker is added to another, is well-known in Daghestan and found to a degree in Svan -- Dzhanashia gives Upper Bal:

NOM	xoča 'good'
NARR	xoč-e:m-n(-)e:m
GEN	xoč-e:m-iš
INSTR	xoča:-m-šv

This non-Kartvelian formation has been linked to Circassian. Oniani refers to Kumaxov as source for his statement that such doubling is not found in Circassian, and thus Circassian cannot be source for this phenomenon in Svan. Consider, then, these examples from Colarusso's recent description of Kabardian (1989.292-3):

	<u>Definite</u>	<u>Indefinite</u>
ABSOLUTIVE	g'ate-r	g'ate 'sword'
OBLIQUE	g'ate-m	g'ate
INSTRUMENTAL	g'ate-m-k'e	g'ate-k'e

Again, even if we as linguists would not perhaps wish to call this "double declension" because of the uncertain status of the -m(-), would non-Kabardians with non-native knowledge of the language analyse the sequence -m-k'e in the same way?

Oniani conveniently ignores the problem of the -x plural-suffix on Svan verbs (e.g. gər-i-x 'they will come', m-a-lät[-x] 'I love X/Xs', x-a-lät[-x] 'X loves Y/Ys', x-a-lät-x 'they love X/Xs', and even ž-a-lät-x 'You-PL love X/Xs'), which looks suspiciously akin to Kabardian (cf. ma-k'o'e 'X goes' vs ma-k'o'e-x 'they go', and also on nouns: g'ate-xe 'swords'). He says nothing of the conjunction i 'and', which resembles coordinators in both Abkhaz and Kabardian, or of the coincidence of Svan xeda 'which one?' with Circassian xet 'who?'. He agrees with Abkhazian ethnographer Shalva Inal-Ipa that the Kabardians only moved to their present location in the 13/14th centuries, so that one should not even suppose any possibility of Circassian influence on Svan, and he totally rejects any conceivable influence on it from Abkhaz (in which point he disagrees with Inal-Ipa, who was in any case only following, as a non-linguist himself, the earlier statements of Marr, Chikobava and Dzhanashia).

I hope I have said enough to shew that Circassian influence most certainly CANNOT be ruled out in Svan. Gvanceladze/Chuxua are right to remonstrate that recognising borrowings in a language is not to belittle that language and in their statement that even before their eastward

migration the Kabardians' ancestors were still geographically in contact with at least part of Svan's domain. In reading Svan texts (usually with Oniani himself!) I have never been seriously attracted by thoughts of any great Abkhazian influence, though the origin of the preverb la- deserves investigation. Also one would like to discover whether the Svan spoken within Abkhazia differs to any significant degree from that of Svanetia proper; unfortunately, I suspect that those best placed to conduct this study will not invest it with the same importance that we might.

As regards W. Georgian toponymy, the texts for criticism are: Dzhnashia's **Cherkess (Adyghean) elements in Georgia's toponymy** (1940;1959), Chikobava's **Kartvelian languages: their historical structure and ancient linguistic appearance** (1948), and Lomtadze's 1956 review of Ingoroq'va's *giorgi merc'ule*. All had argued, to quote Chikobava, that: "There are serious grounds for supposing that Abkhaz-Adyghean tribes preceded Kartvelian tribes on the territory of W. Georgia" (*IKE* 2, 263). A number of hydronyms in Abkhazia contain the element psa/psə, which is clearly identical with the Circassian words psə(χ°) 'water, river'. In Guria we have the hydronym supsa, and in Greek sources the Choroxi was called Akampsis. Both words are argued to contain the same NWC designation for 'river'. Dzhnashia also sees in a variety of W. Georgian hydronyms containing -q'va Circassian q°e 'gorge, river-valley'. By the river Ač'q'va Dzhnashia points to the village Ač', relates this to Ač'ara and mentions the alternative Kartvelian form Ač'is-c'q'ali, so that "Ač'q'va means 'river of Ač'' just as Supsa means 'river of Sur(i)'". I find this rather appealing, and how does one explain NWC elements in Guria, Ač'ara and elsewhere, unless NW Caucasians inhabited these regions at some time in the past?

Oniani, of course, rejects these etymologies and, in discussing q°e, reveals his ignorance of one of the most fundamental features of NWC languages -- their large-scale homonymy. He notes that -q'va is found in a number of Kartvelian surnames (e.g. Ingoroq'va) and asks what could be common in elements designating rivers, gorges, and surnames, forgetting that q°e is also Circassian for 'son'. However, even if we accept the NWC provenance of forms in -psa/ -psə, -q'va, he argues that this indicates only a Circassian presence in W. Georgia, not an Abkhazian one. Note the illogicality here -- even if we ultimately reject any NWC connection for the relevant hydronyms in Guria, Ač'ara and elsewhere, this IN NO WAY affects the relevance of NWC languages to an explanation of parallel phenomena in Abkhazia itself. As for the suggestion that we are dealing with Circassian rather than Abkhazian linguistic items, one simply does not know when or in what locality the 3 NWC languages (Abkhaz, Circassian, Ubykh) became differentiated. I find it quite conceivable that the proto-NWC language was once spoken over essentially the whole territory occupied upto 1864 by the NWC peoples (possibly extending originally down into today's W. Georgia proper), and that the 3 languages

became distinct *in situ* such that NWC elements, even if they are not truly Abkhazian, could be attested in toponyms within Abkhazia. In Abkhaz today 'water' = a-ʒə, 'river' = a-ʒəyas, but the earlier presence of psə in the language cannot be ruled out, for we have a-ps-ta 'gorge' (lit. 'water/river-place of'). One can also quote a number of lexemes connected with water/the sea containing the sequence -ps- (e.g. a-ps(-)lə 'otter/beaver', a-psə(-)ʒ 'fish', a-ps(-)lə-m-ʒ 'sand', a-psa/ə(-)r(-)da-ŋa(-)n 'herring', a-ps(-)rə 'hold (of boat)'). Even though one cannot necessarily be sure of the exact etymologies of all these terms, a-ps(-)lə looks analysable as 'the-water(-)dog', for -lə could easily come from (a-)la = '(the-)dog', an etymology supported by Ubykh bzə-wa 'otter' (literally 'water-dog').

As for Kartvelian toponyms in Abkhazia, Oniani mentions the form cxum(i), the older name of Sukhum, which dates back at least to the chronicle of Dzhuansher (11th cent.). Many have claimed, though Oniani himself is silent on this question, that this designation derives from Svan, where the word means 'hornbeam' (= Geo. rcxila, Ming. cximuri). Such advocates then conclude that the Svans must once have resided on the coast, leaving behind this toponym as proof of their earlier residence, for which there is NO historical evidence whatsoever -- Strabo, for instance, places the Svans where they are today (inland from Dioskurias in the Caucasian mountains). Perhaps in recognition of this little local difficulty but still desirous to assign a Kartvelian etymology to this toponym, one Giorgi Pipia (*saxalxo ganatleba* 8th March 1990) has suggested a Mingrelian original cə-xum(-i) 'dry hornbeam' -- Maq'ashvili's Botanic Dictionary says Ming. cə means 'birch', but never mind that!

Well, what can we say of the name of Abkhazia's capital? Conventional wisdom assumes Sukhum(-i) to be the Turkicised rendition of cxum(-i), earlier styled Sebastro-polis, earlier still known as Dioskurias. Sebastro-polis can only be etymologised in Greek and means 'venerable city', but the etymology of Dioskurias is hotly debated. Kartvelians insist that the word derives in some way from Zan -- Pipia, for example, explains it as Laz sk'ur-i '(mass of) water, river, stream' preceded by a shorthand form of didə 'great(ly)', this being the description of the bay of Sukhum -- Wolfgang Feurstein was, of course, quite correct in pointing out that the adverbial form didə could hardly serve as adjectival epithet to sk'ur-i, a function that would have required the form didə. Well, firstly, we have to note that it is by no means certain that Dioskurias/Sebastopolis are geographically identical with modern-day Sukhum. There is a distinguished tradition which places the ancient town near the mouth of the R. K'odor -- N.B. Cape Iskuria south of this river on J.S. Bell's 1840 map. If this is true, then some kind of Zan etymology is at least more plausible, but I regard a Kartvelian etymology for an ancient site north of the K'odor as extremely unlikely, as I remain to be convinced that any Kartvelian tribe ever lived there prior to relatively recent times -- see my forthcoming article in

Revue des Etudes Géorgiennes et Caucasiennes for a challenge to the conventional Kartvelian view that the toponym Bič'vinta is of Kartvelian origin. And I rather incline to the Greek etymology that explains Dioskurias as meaning the 'city of the Dioskuroi (= sons of Zeus = Castor and Pollux)'. These two demi-gods, according to myth, took part in Jason's voyage and were the patron-saints of sailors. These factors fit most happily with the "heavenly twins" being the eponymous heroes of the most easterly town of the Pontic Euxine. Note also the interesting coincidence whereby Castor was famed for his horsemanship (*Argonautica* I.148), and the tribe regularly placed around Dioskurias were the He:niokhoi 'Charioteers'; skill in horsemanship has always been highly prized amongst all NW Caucasians! It should also be noted in passing that the Greek toponym ended in -s̄ (Dioskurias̄); if Zan sk'ur-i was the source, how would one explain the appearance of this -s̄? The additional -a would be explicable in terms of rendering the word amenable to incorporation within Greek's a-declension.

Incidentally, as a good example of the over-enthusiasm of some to detect Kartvelian elements where none actually exists, note that, although He:niokhoi has an unimpeachable Greek derivation (he:nia 'reins' + okhos 'bearer' from ekho: 'I have/hold'), Simon Q'auxčishvili wrote the following in 1965 (*georgiká* 2, 28): "The names of certain of these tribes [sc. inhabitants of the eastern littoral of the Black Sea -- BGH] are formed with such suffixation as to render their separation from general Kartvelian names unjustified. These names share the suffixes: -gi, -k'i, -xi (e.g. Ἀβαργοί, Σανίγαι, Μοσσυνοίκοι, Ἡνιοχοί, Κολχοί, Ζιχοί)!"

According to Inal-Ipa (*Abxazy* 1965, 111), the Abkhazians' designation for Sukhum (Aq^o'a) is only attested for certain from the 18th cent. -- though numismatic reference to a "Kingdom of Aki" in the 3rd cent. B.C. has been linked to the term Aq^o'a. But in a fascinating observation from an article by Dzhanaşia, dating from the late 30s but only published in 1988 (**The historical geography of the Black Sea Coast**) we read with reference to a work by N. Dadiani (1780-1834): "So it is beyond doubt that according to N. Dadiani Aq'u = Sukhum, whilst Cxom(i) was the town with the palace of the Sharvashidzes between Mač'ara and Sukhum. It is beyond doubt that this is today's K'elasur(i) (better: in its environs)" (p.291). Now as D. Gulia pointed out in the 20s, this is the locality of Abkhazian ოქსურ. I hope no-one is seriously going to suggest that Cxum could give rise to this Abkhazian toponym, but this toponym could quite easily have been deformed into Cxum by incoming Zans unable to get their tongues round the Abkhazian original. This deformed toponym could then have become established for all Kartvelians at a time when Georgia was in the ascendancy following the decline of the Abkhazian Kingdom (10th cent.), and, as the centre of the local town became fixed somewhat to the north, the Turkicised variant will have shifted its reference

to become the designation of the town we know today, whilst the native term will naturally have been retained for the now enlarged conurbation by the Abkhazians themselves.

Purveyors of the indefensible view that the Abkhazians arrived on "Zan" territory only some time in the late middle ages have to answer a number of questions, even if we restrict ourselves to the toponyms discussed above: 1. if incoming Abkhazians were faced with an established toponym for today's capital, why does Abkhaz use only Aq^o'a? I regard Pipia's pronouncements as too ludicrous to bear repetition¹! We have already offered a possible account for the co-existence of native Aq^o'a and the imported Cxum/Sukhum; 2. if Dioskurias was based on some local Zan toponym, why is there no retention of the original form as designation for Sukhum in Laz or, more importantly, in Mingrelian, since on this view the Mingrelians are the native population of the region? 3. if indeed Dioskurias was geographically today's Sukhum, how, when and why was the hypothesised Zan original for Dioskurias replaced by another supposedly Zan toponym Cxum(i)?

What then of Abkhaz influence on Zan? Having listed the preverbs c'a- for Georgian and n-, la-, ta- and k'a- in Zan, which Chikobava and others deemed infiltrations from Abkhaz, Oniani discusses just two -- 1. he rightly observes that in Abkhaz -c'a- signifies 'beneath', whilst in Georgian it indicates 'away', that in Old Georgian the preverb had the shape c'ar- (as Chikobava himself had noted anyway), and probably rightly concludes that the Abkhaz-Georgian relationship here is untenable -- why should Abkhaz have influenced Georgian when the two languages have probably never historically been in contact?! 2. Laz n- 'thither' is claimed to have derived from Abkhaz. Oniani says that only -na- can have this meaning in Abkhaz, that Laz n- is simply the pre-vocalic allomorph of me- (= Geo. mi-), a relationship noted by Chikobava himself (e.g. me-v-ul-u-r 'I go' vs n-ul-u-r 'you-SG go'), and so again there can be no Abkhaz connection. In fact, the Abkhaz preverb -na- can lose its open

¹ Pipia's explanation (following G. Ruxaia) of the Abkhaz name for Sukhum should, however, be laid before readers so that they can make up their own minds and is as follows: "In Zan q'ua means a rounded, protruding part of living beings and objects. For people this is the forehead; for an axe and hoe -- the blunt edge...In Modern Georgian too there is such a word, e.g. danis q'ua 'knife's blunt edge'. In connection with the natural world this word would (have) be(en) used [*do we know that it ever was so used?* -- BGH] to signify the edge of that part of the mainland which cuts deeply into the sea or broad river (a jutting out section of coast). From this was created the term cxum-is q'ua to mark the protruding portion of the town's coastal territory.

"The handy abbreviation, which characterises the Apswa tongue and makes words sound more euphonic, dispensed with the first component of this term and left only the second. To this was attached the article a-, which is prefixed to all nouns in Apswa. Thus was Aq^o'a created.

"Apswa borrowed the word q'ua also to indicate a river-bank, giving a-q^o'a-ra," with which, incidentally, Uslar connected the toponym Aq^o'a.

vowel in two contexts: (a) when followed by another *-a-* (e.g. *d-n[a-]a+la-ga-yt'* 'X began it'); (b) with a number of verbs that are difficult to classify (e.g. *a-bna d-nə-(Ø+)l-q'a-yt'* 'X emerged from the wood'; *yə-žəyba yə-nap'ə (Ø-)n-(Ø+)ta-y-c'a-yt'* 'He put his hand into his pocket'). And so, again the situation is not quite as simple as Oniani wants his readers to think, though on balance I am inclined to agree that this relationship too is unlikely. However, on the basis of these two points alone Oniani informs his readers thus: "As we see, hypotheses about the borrowed character of Georgian and Laz-Mingrelian preverbs from Abkhaz are insupportable." He naturally proceeds to approve of the absurd notion of Ingoroq'va according to which the historical Abkhazians (Abasgoi, Apsilae) were a Kartvelian people, whereas the present-day Abkhazians, now frequently styled the *Apswas* from the Abkhazians' own self-designation, must have migrated to Abkhazia only 400-500 years ago -- note this is 200-300 years earlier than the time suggested by Ingoroq'va himself, presumably because Oniani knows full well that the evidence of travellers/missionaries from the mid 17th cent. is against such a settlement-date. He is even moved to ask why, if today's Abkhazians are really the Abkhazians of history, they do not call themselves *apxazebi* rather than *Apswaa*!!! Hopefully we English will be spared being asked to call ourselves *ingliselebi* after the model in question! It is hard to avoid the depressing conclusion that Oniani is calculatedly prostituting his discipline of philology in the same way as historian Mariam Lortkipanidze has also debased her own by similarly choosing to characterise Ingoroq'va's fantasy as one of the "scholarly" hypotheses on the origin of the Abkhazians (vid. *lit' erat ūruli sakartvelo* 16th Feb 1990).

But perhaps K. Lomtadze's successor as the leading Georgian specialist on Abkhaz, Gvanceladze, and his Mingrelian co-author, Chuxua, have something pertinent to say about Abkhaz-Zan linguistic connections? They do not. As regards the Abkhazian issue, the best they can produce is: "Let's say we accept as the final truth the opinion repeated by Oniani of an author he does not name [? -- B.G.H.] to the effect that the present-day Abkhazians came to the location of their current residence in the 18th century. Does Oniani really suppose that today's or an independent Georgia is thereby relieved of responsibility towards its citizens?" Whilst most people regard one divinity as more than enough to cope with, Chikobava, Dzhnashia and others enjoy divine status in certain quarters and, when attacked, have to be defended with the fanaticism that is sadly all too often associated with religious zealots. For these fanatics the question of Abkhazian residence in Abkhazia is irrelevant, though all three authors, both critics and criticised, happen to quote with predictable approval Dzhnashia's 1937 statement that "over a large part of their present territory the Abkhazians proper were preceded by a Kartvelian population" (**tubal-tabali, t'ibareni, iberi**). Now, if one looks at the original text, one sees

that this sentence is preceded by the words: "We shew elsewhere that..." This "elsewhere" is certainly nowhere in the 74 pages of the above-mentioned article. Gvanceladze/Chuxua refer us to Dzhanashia's 1940 article **The oldest native report on the Kartvelians' proto-homeland in the light of oriental history**. Having read all 80 pages of this paper I have to reveal that the Urheimat in question is the Choroxi-basin, and the only reference to Abkhazia concerns the toponym T'amš. So the motivation behind Dzhanashia's statement, which flies in the face of the arguments he himself advanced, as we have seen, remains a mystery!

For some time I have been attracted by the problem of Abkhaz influence on Zan, especially Mingrelian. In Tbilisi in 1987 I read a paper, which was very warmly received (by even Oniani amongst others in attendance!), wherein I argued that the Mingrelian construction:

Ming. vit	boč'k'a-š'i	e-pš-a	ŷvin-i
Geo. at-i	k'asr-i(*s)	savse	ŷvino
Eng. 10	(*of)barrels	full	wine

can only be explained as a calque on the Abkhaz (and NWC) construction for 'full of'. Included in the eventual collection of papers from our last Colloquium in Paris will be a further article where I argue for Abkhaz influence behind the use in at least part of Mingrelia of the conjunction muč'o(-t) 'how(?)' in place of namda 'that'. We are all well aware that all borrowing involves a degree of bilingualism, and Mingrelians are not today (nor have they been, as far as I am aware, over the last 350 years) famous for their knowledge of Abkhaz². However, if such syntactic influence proves little in itself, what of the structural properties of Zan?

In a certain article published in *Literary Georgia* on 21st July 1989 I ventured to recall Dzhanashia's 1932 query as to whether Mingrelian's general subordinator -ni might not be a borrowing of Abkhaz's absolute marker -nā. As is well known, it is impossible to reconstruct a proto-Kartvelian complementiser. Mingrelian -ni behaves much like Georgian rom, except that it combines much more freely with other subordinating conjunctions. In Laz we have nā 'that', where the open vowel need present no problem, as internally within Abkhaz there is evidence of a number of shifts from open to close vowel. It is impossible to be dogmatic on this issue in the present state of our knowledge -- the problem is, of course, that Abkhaz -nā is much more restricted in occurrence than Mingrelian -ni. However, the link cannot be totally excluded, and note that, if it exists, we are presumably talking of a period prior to the Laz migration to

²Historian D. Bakradze spoke in 1860 of the Mingrelian residents of Ilori (in today's Gali District) as being able to converse in Abkhaz in addition to Mingrelian -- quoted by Z.V. Anchabadze on page 297 of his *Из истории средневековой Абхазии*.

Lazistan, which Feurstein has dated to the Arab invasions (i.e. 7th cent.). We still need to keep the open mind referred to above.

And so to the preverbs... We are all familiar with the preverbal system in Georgian: in origin they were adverbial elements that became fused with verb-roots to shew place/direction, which role they preserve with verbs of motion, though today they mainly mark perfective aspect. The Georgian preverbs are:

	<u>'Thither'-orientation</u>	<u>'Hither'-orientation</u>
mi-	'thither'	mo- 'hither'
a(ṽ)-	'up'	a(ṽ)-mo
še-	'in'	še-mo-
ga(n)-	'out'	ga-mo-
da-	'down; PLURAL'	[da-mo-]
ga(+?)da-	'across, through'	ga(+?)d-mo-
c'a-	'away'	c'a-mo-
ča-	(< *še-da-) 'down in'	ča-mo-

(plus mi-mo- 'to and fro')

i.e. a quite restricted basic number, the addition of -mo- essentially doubling the total. In Svan there are 8:

I: ži- 'up' vs ču- 'down' vs sga- 'in' vs ka- 'out'

II: la- ASPECT vs an- 'hither' vs ad- and es- 'thither'

No combination within groups, though any combination across groups, is feasible. Compared with this we have in Abkhaz, as a typical NWC language, according to Arie Spruit's presentation, 123 preverbs of local reference + what he calls directional preverbs -aa- 'hither', -na- 'thither', -y°a- 'upwards', -la- 'downwards' -x'a- 'backwards'), which serve to localise quite specifically the verbal action. I. Asatiani's 1953 discussion of Zan preverbs gives the Mingrelian total as 92, of which 12 are simplex -- Laz has 50, of which 8 are simplex. These figures alone, I suggest, are sufficient to make anyone with an open mind sit up and think, but we do not have to be content with mere figures. Let me quote from Lomtadze's 1956 review of Ingoroq'va (p.139): "For a good while attention has been turned (by P'. Č'araia, Arn. Chikobava) to the existence of preverbs of Abkhazian origin in the Laz-Mingrelian verb and in this connection to the building on the Abkhazian model of stative verb-roots. In Georgian, as a rule, verbs denoting a state (statives) do not take preverbal elements, e.g. we cannot have a preverb with zis 'X sits', c'evs 'X lies', sžinavs 'X sleeps' and similar verbs. Georgian in this respect preserves the original norm for statives. But in Laz-Mingrelian the same stative verbs essentially differ in this regard from the corresponding verbs in Georgian: Laz-Mingrelian statives appear with a variety of of preverbs: e.g.

xe = zis 'X sits' vs a-la-xe = gverdit zis 'X sits beside(Y)' vs mi-to-xe = šig zis 'X sits within (Y)' vs gi-ma-xe = razedme zis 'X sits on something' vs a-ša-xe = šoris zis 'X sits among (Y)' etc...

This system of stative verbs in Laz-Mingrelian is composed through Abkhaz influence. Apart from the system, the very preverbal materials here are Abkhaz: cp.

Ab. dθ-t°a-w+p' = zis 'X sits' BUT d-rθ+la-t°a-w+p' = [mat-] šoris/šig zis 'X sits among/within [them]', dθ-(Ø+)ta-t°a-w+p' = rameši šig zis 'X sits inside something' etc

Facts of this order are not the result of simple influence. In this case we are dealing with an Abkhazian substrate in Laz-Mingrelian. This fact is one of the distant past and points to a most ancient and intimate contact between the relevant tribes." So much for Oniani, Ingoroq'va, Lortkipanidze and like-minded politicised academics!

Apart from drawing readers' attention to the correlation Mingrelian -t_o- = Abkhaz -t_a-, which suggests the borrowing occurred prior to the Mingrelian sound-change of proto-Kartvelian *a to o, I now list a number of Abkhaz-Mingrelian parallels in preverbal usage.

The 2 most common preverbs for 'in' in Abkhaz are -t_a- (for a delimited space) and -l_a- (for masses). For Mingrelian -t_a- cf. xeporča-ša Yu ki-m+t-i-x-un-u = Abkhaz a-t'θ yθ-maŷra yθ-(Ø+)ta-y-r-t°a-yt' 'He made the owl sit in his sleeve'. Of -l_a- Asatiani says: "A group of preverbs with the component -l_a- indicate place 'within' or motion 'to inside something'...e.g. mi-la-xe 'X sits within something'". Note that for 'within a narrow space' Abkhaz uses -k'əl- -- as Dzhanashia noted, this very preverb is found in Mingrelian in the shape -k'illa- (e.g. žap-iš liš-is k'illa-rŷv-ap-a = Abkhaz a-g°ər a-rax°əc a-k'əl-da-ra = Geo. žap-is nems-ši ga-q'r-a = English 'to thread a needle').

In Abkhaz -c'ä- means 'under' (e.g. dθ-(Ø+)c'a-t°a-w+p' 'X sits under Y'). Of this preverb in Zan Asatiani says: "Preverbs with this component form 2 mutually exclusive groups: 1. ...position 'down, below' or motion 'to below'...; 2. ...place 'in front' or motion 'to in front'". Perhaps this split indicates a conjunction of 2 homonymous preverbs, one borrowed from Abkhaz meaning 'below', the other held in common with Georgian meaning 'forward, away, in front'.

Having borrowed, as I hope everyone can accept, a number of preverbs, Mingrelian (Zan) was free to develop its own usage for them, so that we have disparities whereby Mingrelian -l_a- appears where Abkhaz uses something much more specific (e.g. mi-la-v-o-x-e-k čkim žgargval-s = Abkh. s-pacxa sθ-(Ø+)y°na-t°a-w+p' = Engl. 'I sit in my pacxa'); alternatively, Abkhaz may use -l_a- whilst Mingrelian has the preverb it shares with

Georgian meaning 'in' (e.g. Abkh. a-mṣēn d-a+la-la-wa-yt' = Ming. zṽva-ṣa mu-ṣo-ur-s = Eng. 'X enters the sea', from mi-ṣa-; cf. Geo. -ṣe-).

In Georgian reciprocity has to be indicated outside the verb. In Abkhaz it is indicated within the verb by means of the markers -ay(+ba)-. In Mingrelian the preverb i(/a/e)k'o- can shew this relationship *within the verb* (e.g. i(/a/e)k'o-xval-am-a = Abkhaz [a-lay+n-ya-ra or [a-lay+k°-ṣ°a-ra 'to meet one another').

Mingrelian complex preverbs consisting of 2 elements, whose role is to shew direction/location, can then be perfectivised after the regular model of Georgian preverbs by the addition of a small number of perfectivising simplex preverbs (e.g. zṽva-ṣa ge-m-ṣa-rt-u 'X entered the sea'). Such a possibility does not exist in Laz, suggesting that the typically Abkhazian system prevailed in Zan prior to its split into Laz & Mingrelian, such that Mingrelian subsequently succumbed to pressure from the Georgian preverbal system.

And finally a piece of syntax: Asatiani quotes from Chikobava's and Qipshidze's collections of texts respectively the following examples from Laz: mč'ima goniṽu vs mč'ima goliṽu 'the rain cleared up'. If this verb has active morphology throughout its paradigm, then we would expect the Narrative subject (in -k) to these Aorist forms (cf. Georgian c'vima-m ga+da-i-ṽ-o). If the Laz verb is indeed active, then the noun for 'rain', standing in the Nominative, must be the object. What then is the subject? There isn't one. Do we perhaps here have a syntactic calque on Abkhaz a-k°a (∅-∅+)x-na-ga-yt', where -na- is the affix 'it' referring to an impersonal subject, presumably 'the sky/nature'? If this is a calque, consider how old it must be!

What does all this suggest? It suggests that the linguistic evidence alone is not merely consistent with at least 2,000 years of contact between Abkhazians and Zans but demands it -- I say 2,000 years because archaeologists accept this time-depth AS A MINIMUM. This is supported by the evidence of the classical authors, by Johannes de Galonifontibus (cf. Tardy 1978) who observed in 1404 that the Abkhazians have their own language, separate and to the north of the Mingrelians, whose language in turn is separate from that of the Georgians, and by the continuous reports we have from the mid 17th century. I assume the precise boundary between the two peoples will have been flexible but located somewhere between the K'odor and Engur rivers -- the Svans in their mountain-fastnesses no doubt had much less solid contact with their western neighbours. I leave it to readers to ask themselves why certain Kartvelian linguists, historians, writers and editors in the media should be so recklessly pursuing a different, wholly untenable hypothesis with such zeal today. The question of who first settled W. Georgia proper (i.e. south of Abkhazia) can safely be left for discussion by others elsewhere.

And finally, those who insist on running down a blind alley would perhaps oblige by explaining an item on the short list of NWC words given by my fellow-Englishman J.S. Bell in his 1840 **Journal of a residence in Circassia**, a man to whose lot it fell to have to defend North West Caucasians at the time of an earlier threat to their security. In the language of the "Azras" (i.e. Abkhazians, according to the Ubykh designation azv̄a) the word for 'slave' is a-ḡər-wa, loaned also to Ubykh from Abkhaz according to Chirikba (1986³). This is none other than the Abkhaz ethnonym 'Mingrelian' -- accepting Oniani's contention that philology can be a sure guide to historical truth, what historical truth must we conclude to lie behind this particular linguistic fact⁴?!

In 1960 Kuipers said the following of Kabardian (and of the NWC languages in general) -- it deserves to be savoured and remembered: "The external conditions for conservatism, in language as well as in other cultural matters, were certainly present in the case of speakers who have inhabited the inaccessible mountains of the NWC since times immemorial and remained comparatively free from foreign influences. The major impact on their language and culture has been that of Turkic peoples, but this impact seems to have been strongest in relatively recent times and, unlike so many other languages, Circassian has not yielded to the assimilatory powers of Turkic. It is quite conceivable that under these conditions of comparative isolation ancient linguistic characteristics, which have long since disappeared elsewhere, could survive until the present day" (**Phoneme and Morpheme in Kabardian**, p.113). Perhaps we can all say 'Amen!' to this and get on with the serious business of deciding how these archaic tongues can best be preserved in the face of all relevant dangers.⁵

³ Абхазские лексические заимствования в убыкском языке, in Проблемы лексики и грамматики языков народов Кавказа, Черкесск, pp.112-124.

⁴Philology can only reveal historical truths if practised properly. For a discussion of another instance of its misuse with regard to the Abkhazian question see my paper **The valid and non-valid application of etymology to history** (in **SOAS Working Papers in Linguistics**, 1992). Other articles of mine dealing with aspects of this same problem are: **Language, Nationalism and the West's response** (in **Papers from the 75th Anniversary Conference of the School of Slavonic and East European Studies, volume 1: New Configurations in Post-Totalitarian Society: Nation, Community and Ethnic Identity**, due to appear in 1992), and **Abkhazia, a problem of identity and ownership** (to appear in **The Nationalities Journal**).

⁵In the short discussion that followed the presentation of this paper W. Boeder (Oldenburg) raised the methodological point about hypothesising possible Circassian influence on the morphology of Svan without first adducing evidence of lexical borrowing by Svan from Circassian, since the borrowing of morphology is usually preceded by the borrowing of lexical items. My reply was that, in the absence of anything that could claim to be a comprehensive dictionary of Svan, it was difficult to hunt for lexemes of Circassian origin, but that we should be in a better position to do just this, when Kaldani's long promised **Svan-Georgian Dictionary** is finally published by the Linguistics Institute in Tbilisi. In the meantime it was to be hoped that

Supplement

Above we have examined some of the linguistic evidence that supports the centuries-old presence of the North West Caucasian Abkhazians upon the territory of today's Abkhazia, from where their neighbours to the south(-east) for at least two millennia have been the Kartvelian Zans (viz. Mingrelians and Laz). This was in response to one of the latest proponents of Ingoroq'va's pseudo-hypothesis that the Abkhazians only appeared on their present territory at the most half a millennium ago. Not all Kartvelians who discuss the Abkhazian problem start from such a patently false assumption. However, even those who do not doubt Abkhazian aboriginality in Abkhazia often make imprecise statements about the historical language-situation in Abkhazia and go on to draw illegitimate conclusions from these statements. I wish to close by offering (what I hope are) some pertinent remarks on the sort of observations I have in mind.

It has been far too commonly heard of late for concrete quotations to be necessary that for about 1,000 years up until Russian involvement in Abkhazia in the 19th century the Abkhazians "used Georgian as literary, church- and state-language." The implication in most cases is probably that, if Russian influence is removed from Abkhazia, the Abkhazians will again[sic!] become knowledgeable of, and respectful towards, Georgian language and culture. There was a time, of course, when much more sweeping assumptions were drawn. For example, in a recent book on the 19th century activist Dimit'ri Q'ipiani Uturashvili (1989.254) writes: "In connection with the ethnogenesis of the Kartvel people D. Q'ipiani wrote (1853): 'Although today it is the Kartvels residing in the Governate of Tbilisi who are called *kartvelebi*, nevertheless to this tribe we shall assign not only the Imeretians and Gurians, who spoke one and the same language and were of the same religion before the time of Parnavaz [3rd century B.C. -- G.H.], but to this tribe also belong the Mingrelians, Abkhazians, Svans as well as the Kobuletiens, Ajarians, Laz and the Ch'ar-Belaknian Ingiloans, who are today all muslim'.

"D. Q'ipiani's assignment of the Abkhazians to the Kartvel ethnos can, it appears, be explained by the long and intimate Kartvelo-Abkhazian cultural-historical relationship, by their multi-faceted common historical fate, which united both people, and by the fact that Abkhazia always represented a part of a united Georgia. The Georgian thinker judged the Abkhazians ethno-culturally to be so close a tribe that he placed them among the Kartvel tribes."

More recently still we read Besarion Jorbenadze's (1991.11-12) discussion of the linguistic description by Vakhusht' (1696-1756) of certain regions of Georgia: "Vakhushti's description of Megrelia, Chaneti (Lazistan) and Svaneti attracts attention:

we could all keep a more open mind than that manifested by Oniani. I might have added that consideration and preparation of a parallel **Mingrelian-Georgian Dictionary** was no less overdue.

"Odishi (Megrelia): Noblemen speak Georgian, but have their home language as well (Megrelian is implied).

"Chaneti (Lazistan): They are mainly of Mohammedan faith; the number of Christians is small. Some know the Georgian language.

"Svaneti: The Svans also have their own language, but they know Georgian too.

"Thus, Vakhushti assesses the various ethnic parts of Georgia by the same principle used back in the 10th century by Giorgi Merchule in his work: a person whose mother tongue is Georgian and the faith is Christian is considered to be Georgian, while the country in which divine service is conducted in Georgian is Georgia...

"To be sure, from the modern point of view, it is unwarranted to define nationality according to faith. But the foregoing reflects the historical view on the point.

"Vakhushti supplies also noteworthy information about Abkhazia and Ossetia:

"Abkhazia: They have their own language, but noblemen know Georgian.

"Ossetia: Their language is old Dvalian. Now they speak Ossetic...Those having contacts with Kartli and Racha know Georgian."

Jorbenadze is perfectly correct in saying that faith does not determine one's ethnicity. But equally it has to be stressed that the smattering of a language that was necessary for worship in churches in mediæval times in no way meant that the language in question (be it Latin in most of Europe, or Georgian in parts of Transcaucasia) was in any meaningful sense 'known' to all who worshipped in it, just as many of the non-Arab muslims throughout the world today who can chant various parts of the Qoran in Arabic would claim to know Arabic.

In similar vein, to talk of Abkhazians having Georgian historically as their "literary language" gives an equally misleading impression of the historical situation, for what possible relevance was a 'literary language' to anyone in the Caucasus (Abkhazian, Ossete, Svan, Mingrelian, or even Georgian too) when the vast majority of the population of the Caucasus was quite simply illiterate prior to the introduction of universal schooling by the Soviets? I would suggest that Vakhusht', far from presenting us with "noteworthy" information, describes an entirely normal and wholly to be expected situation, namely that it was only the leaders of local Abkhazian (as well as Mingrelian) society who were competent in the main literary language of the region, namely Georgian, utilising it for both literary and political purposes. After all, no-one denies the important cultural and political role historically played in Transcaucasia by the Georgians and their language -- what the Abkhazians object to is the blithe assumption that what might well have been true at a certain period in history for a portion of the upper strata in their society gives the Georgians and their fellow-Kartvelians today the right to regard Abkhazian land as theirs to do with as they wish. If the Mingrelians and Svans seem to have no objection to being called 'Georgians' because they had and have no literary,

ecclesiastical or state-language other than Georgian, that is their affair, though one wonders what the reaction of most Mingrelians would be to the further statement of Vakhusht' that Mingrelian is simply "degenerate Georgian [çamœdari kartuli -- G.H.] (for example ©oronti = ©merti, fkimi = femi)", a view which well accords with that of Sul Khan Saba Orbeliani (1658-1725), who in his dictionary unflatteringly defined the Georgian word Ω©ur†uli as "the distorted speech of Mingrelians or the noise of jays and magpies"! However, there is no reason to extend this questionable logic to the Abkhazians, Southern Ossetians or the few thousand North Central Caucasian Bats people, who live in the K'akhetian village of Zemo Alvani and who are classified for census-purposes as 'Georgians'.

The one truly noteworthy observation of Vakhusht' is rather that, whilst he ascribes only limited knowledge of Georgian to Abkhazians, Mingrelians, Laz and Ossetians, he seems to allow blanket-knowledge of it amongst the Svans. This is surprising. Writing in 1891 the Svan Besarion Nizharadze (1964.169-172) in a short article entitled *The spread of the Georgian language in Svanetia* commented favourably on the speed with which Georgian was being acquired at the time by especially male Svans, who learned it while spending the winter-months working outside their snowed-in Svanetia down in the Georgian lowlands. Of the 290 males in Ushguli 160 knew Georgian (compared with just 4 in 1870); in K'ala out of 219 males 199 knew Georgian (compared with 6 in 1870); in Ipari out of 546 males 306 knew Georgian (compared with 3 in 1870). What happened between the time of Vakhusht' and 1870 that could possibly explain such an apparent decline in the knowledge of Georgian in Svanetia? I suggest that the information in Vakhusht' is simply inaccurate, and that the situation in Svanetia in his day will actually have paralleled that obtaining in Mingrelia and Abkhazia, namely that it will have been only the nobility and presumably the clerics also who had anything more than a mere smattering of the Georgian tongue.

If, as many Georgians seem to take for granted, one assumes that all four of the Kartvelian peoples, simply by virtue of being Kartvelian, have always spoken Georgian, how can we explain the separate development of Svan, Mingrelian and Laz by a process of gradual differentiation of the parent Proto-Kartvelian, whose fourth descendant is Georgian itself? Had Svans, Mingrelians and the Laz historically remained Georgian-speaking, Georgian would not have the three sister-languages it now boasts. The (near) universal knowledge of Georgian today among Mingrelians and Svans stems in the main from the introduction of basic schooling for everyone by the Soviets, which for Georgians, Mingrelians and Svans has largely been at Georgian-language schools

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