

Tamaz Gamq'relidze, director of the Oriental Institute in Tbilisi, member of both the Georgian and Soviet Academies of Sciences, and honorary member of both the British and American Academies published in 1991 the Georgian version of an article entitled *On the History of the Tribal Names of Ancient Colchis (On the historical-etymological relation of the ethnonyms 'Apxaz-/Abazg-' and 'Abaza/Apswa')*. The Georgian original was the full version of the article, and it appeared in the Georgian journal **macne** 'Reporter' (Historical Series 2, 1991, 7-16). A shortened version was published in one of the Georgian newspapers, where it was stated that the full article should be made available in both Russia and abroad. A Russian translation duly appeared in the internationally respected Moscow journal **Voprosy Jazykoznanija** 'Questions of Linguistics', whose editor at the time was none other than Tamaz Gamq'relidze (=TG); I subsequently translated the Georgian version into English in order to help expose the tendentious nature of the argumentation — this was published, with my commentary, as "The Valid and Non-valid Application of Etymology/Philology to History", firstly in: *SOAS Working Papers in Linguistics*, 2 (1991-92, 5-24), and then in *Revue des Etudes Géorgiennes et Caucasiennes* 6-7, 1993, 247-264. During the course of the article the country of the Missimians is mentioned as forming part of Abazgia from the VIth century. Although TG does not pursue the ethnic identity of the Missimian tribe, it has been suggested elsewhere by Kartvelian (Simon Q'aughchishvili 1936, for example) scholars that they too were Kartvelians. This latter association was taken up in the early 1990s by Marik'a Lortkipanidze, and, since this debate demonstrates how important philological data can be to historical argumentation, I shall make some comments on the interpretation of the relevant text.

On page 9 (i.e. in the Georgian text) of Lortkipanidze's brochure 'The Abkhazians and Abkhazia' (Tbilisi 1990), of which TG's article is a sort of philological equivalent, she quotes approvingly the views of certain Kartvelian scholars to the effect that the Missimians were of Kartvelian stock. In the Russian original of his scathing review of this work (newspaper 'Abxazija', 16 July 1991, p.3) the Russian archaeologist/historian, Yuri Voronov, assassinated in 1995, stated: 'To claim that culturally and historically the Missimians were Kartvelians is an affront to the memory of Agathias.' In her reply to this criticism (newspaper 'Svobodnaja Gruzija' 9 Aug 1991, p.3) Lortkipanidze states: 'Although Agathias underlines the relatedness of the Apsilians and Missimians, he also stresses that their languages as well as their customs were different.' And in an adapted version of his original review, written to take account of Lortkipanidze's response, Voronov re-emphasised that Agathias in the Vth century testified to the 'cultural and linguistic closeness of the Apsilians and Missimians.' How can this divergence of interpretation be explained?

Agathias' text was published in volume III of his charming series *georgik'a*, which contains Greek writers' reports on Georgia, by Q'aughchishvili in 1936. All texts in this 8-volume series are given a parallel translation into Georgian. The relevant passage occurs on page 86. If we translate the Georgian into English, we might obtain: 'Sot'erike went down into the country of the so-called Missimians, who are subjects, like the Apsilians, of the king of the Colchians, but they speak in a different language and also pursue different laws.' Now this English version (and indeed Q'aughchishvili's Georgian rendition) are rather ambiguous as to which two of

the three peoples mentioned are being contrasted in terms of their languages and customs — is it the Missimians and the Apsilians (as Lortkipanidze argues), or is it the Missimians and the Colchians (as Voronov interprets the sentence)? Neither the Georgian nor the English can resolve the matter, but, of course, we can refer (and in all conscience must do so) to the Greek original. In the Greek there is no ambiguity of any sort for the simple reason that the language possesses a pair of clitics (men...de) whose job is to accompany and thereby indicate each component of a contrasting pair. The relative clause here has the Missimians as its head; within the clause appear our clitics, the former following the complement 'subjects', the latter coming after the noun for 'language'. The interpretation is clear — the Missimians, while they are subjects of the Colchians differ from them in language and customs. The phrase 'like the Apsilians' is an appendage to the first qualifying remark about the Missimians and is to be understood as stating that both the Missimians and the Apsilians were subjects of the Colchians. Taking the passage on page 86 with the statement on page 162 that the Apsilians were a 'common (i.e. related) and neighbouring people' to the Missimians, we see that Voronov is perfectly correct in stressing the cultural and linguistic genetic relatedness of the Apsilians and the Missimians, which latter word in Greek must again derive from the Abkhazian surname *Marshan*, the princely holders of which traditionally lived around Ts'ebelda (Tibelos of Agathias' Greek text), as the Abkhazian historian Zurab Anchabadze proposed in 1959 and have nothing to do with the Svans' self-designation *məshwan*, on the basis of which suggestion Q'aukhchishvili hypothesised that the Missimians, like the Apsars, were a Kartvelian tribe occupying areas of present-day Abkhazia! The term 'Apsars' (or in its Georgian form *apsarebi*) is clearly an attempt by a Georgian chronicler to render into Georgian the Abkhazian's self-designation 'Apswaa', and nothing more, as Q'aukhchishvili must have known all too well in his heart of hearts. The chronicler in question explains how the great queen Tamar (1184-1213) selected the name Lasha as nickname for her son Giorgi (the IVth of Georgia), noting that the word 'is translated in the language of the Apsars as "enlightener of the world" — in Abkhaz /a.laSHa/ (where -SH- is the retroflex fricative) means 'bright, clear'.

Any attempt to counter this argument by referring, for instance, to such works as Prof. David Braund's 'Georgia in Antiquity' (1994), which speaks on p.310 of 'the cultural and linguistic gulf between the Misimiani and Apsilii', will fail, because Braund, as he admitted to me in a personal letter of 19 Jan 1996, did not go back to Agathias' Greek text but relied on the sort of ambiguous English translation illustrated above...

The conclusion to be drawn from the above is that historians have a duty to consult wherever possible original texts before framing statements that might well have no historical validity, AND that linguists have a duty to reflect as accurately and in as much detail as possible facts about the languages on which they work, so that their imprecise statements do not form the basis for the mistakes of others