

Ethno-demographic history of Abkhazia, 1886 - 1989

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Chapter 15. Demography: The Abkhazians: A Handbook by George Hewitt (Editor)

Demography has many aspects. With regard to the Abkhaz, their famed longevity comes immediately to mind. However, it is difficult to prove just how old one is when, at the supposed time of one's birth, registration was the exception rather than the norm. It has been noted that in the (15 January) 1970 All-Union Census the number of people in some higher age cohorts was actually larger than had been the size of corresponding (eleven year younger) cohorts in the (15 January) 1959 Census. Unless we assume a pensioner-invasion of the USSR in between, this must caution us to realize that some people may have a tendency in old age to advance more rapidly in years than the rest of us!¹

However, we shall not deal with this interesting matter here, nor with any other of the more classical topics of demography. What we shall restrict ourselves to here is what is in Russian so aptly termed ethno-demography (*étnodemografia*). This issue is controversial. Generally, Georgian and pro-Georgian writers try to prove the largest possible percentage of 'Georgians' (i.e., Kartvelians) in the territory that today is Abkhazia throughout history, whereas Abkhaz and pro-Abkhaz writers perform the process from an opposite point of view. We shall narrow our focus in the main to Abkhazia, treating the Abkhaz diaspora only in a cursory manner. Concentrating on the topic of Kartvelian versus Abkhaz dominance, we shall also allocate less space to the many other groups in Abkhazia's history than would be desirable if space were no problem.

Our focus in time will be the period from 1864 until 1989; in fact, the first good source we can use is for 1886. Not that we lack sources; there are literally many thousands of them. We will here restrict ourselves to a) what may be called the canonical sources, i.e. those used in normative Soviet scholarship, namely census-results for 1897, 1926, 1939, 1959, 1970, 1979 and 1989, and b) a few of the 'non-canonical' sources shunned by the Soviets and thus regularly overlooked by Westerners.

The theoretical and methodological pitfalls in writing the ethno-demography of Abkhazia are awesome indeed. We cannot even try to list them here; hopefully we shall soon do so elsewhere. For a useful introduction to the Russian and Soviet Censuses in general, see Clem (1986). Suffice it to say here that it is certainly not enough to grab a book from a shelf, open it and take out an isolated figure or two, as is so often done when the pseudo-objectivity of numbers is employed (more often than one would believe, even such shortest of quotes will on close inspection turn out to be patently false). Figures have a context, which is often very complex and must be considered. If this were not so, future historians might indeed conclude that hordes of pensioners actually did descend on the USSR between 1959 and 1970.

¹ Note that we are not denying that the phenomenon of Abkhaz longevity exists.

Figures before 1864

The Russian Empire incorporated the territory that today is Abkhazia only after the end of organized West Caucasian resistance in 1864. Before that, no real administration existed, although some Russian presence had intermittently been maintained, namely on the coast, rising and falling with the ebb and flow of Russian fortunes on the Black Sea, having been very low as late as the Crimean War. 'No administration' means 'no reliable figures'. Despite or because of this, we have a large number of demographic figures for this period. To call these estimates would be to accord honour where none is due. None of the authors of our sources could or did claim to have counted the people, or at least to have visited all inhabited places, many of them inaccessible, some accepting no outside authority at all. The figures, even when compiled by people in a (semi-)official capacity, were based as much on hearsay as not. Before 1864, neither Russians nor Ottomans nor any other power, local or otherwise, were in a position to make anything like a realistic estimate of the population. To give any of these guesses (for that is what they are) precedence would be quite arbitrary.

What can be surmised is ethnographic rather than demographic in nature; namely, that the population consisted mainly of people speaking Abkhaz; in the north, the boundaries with speakers of other West Caucasian tongues, i.e., Ubykh and Circassian, were ill-defined, as bi- or possibly trilingual groups lived and moved in the area. Not far away (closer than today) were also bands of Abazinians, plus some hordes of Turkic-speaking Noghays. To the east, high altitudes made for a clear boundary with Turkic Karachays and Kartvelian Svans, although it need not necessarily have conformed to modern borders. In the south, the strip of land known as Samurzaq'an(o) was a bone of contention between the ruling houses of most of Abkhazia, and of Mingrelia; the locals were largely Georgian orthodox and probably to a large degree bilingual in Abkhaz and Mingrelian. It would prove difficult to decide whether these were Abkhaz in the process of mingrelianisation or vice-versa². Beyond the Ingur began Mingrelia proper. Only in some of the tiny coastal towns was the population somewhat more mixed. Besides people from the hinterland, there were Turks and other Ottoman Muslims, as well as possibly some Greeks, Armenians, Jews or Persians. Presence of Russians was limited to places where, and times when, their garrisons were in place. Due to the slave trade, for which Abkhazia provided entrepôts, there may have been some Africans.

The slave trade was also responsible for what one could euphemistically call out-migration. The tradition of Abkhaz men being sold was old, the ethnonym *Abha:z* appearing, for example, in mediæval Mamluk sources. Another form of this export delivered females to Ottoman harems. The dimension of this body-drain is unclear. The Abkhaz were also decimated through risings, wars, epidemics and abysmally low living standards, which between them may have more than offset natural growth for longish periods.

² The discussion of contemporary material by Hewitt (1993b.275-277; 1995b.Ft.15) clearly supports the former [Editor].

From 1864 until 1886

Even before 1864, the out-migration of Abkhaz accelerated. In 1864, it reached considerable proportions, then declined until the end of 1866, when a doomed Abkhaz rising that lasted well into 1867 led to a second wave. Another lull followed until the Russo-Ottoman war of 1877/1878, when Ottoman troops landed in Abkhazia and were supported by local irregulars. Russian victory meant heavy casualties and the outflux of probably an actual majority of the population; wide areas were totally depopulated.

Again, we will not attempt here to grapple with the many figures of how many Abkhaz actually left. The Ottoman authorities generally indiscriminately counted all the Caucasian arrivals under a single heading; when Abkhaz are listed separately, they often may have been, or included, either Abazinians or Ubykhs. Finally, the appalling loss of life *en route* meant that only a portion of the out-migrants from the Russian Empire ever became immigrants into the Ottoman realm; some entered the country illegally by land and sea (for example being smuggled in as slaves) and were thus not counted at all. The Russians, who were in a better position to count, were not too interested.

Numbers were, however, dramatic, especially between 1864 and 1878. A trickle continued long afterwards, in fact outlasting both Empires. There was also a considerable remigration of Abkhaz unhappy with life in the Ottoman Empire, although in size it was just a fraction of the out-migration. Some Abkhaz who had gone to the Batumi area were reincorporated into Russia without bodily returning, being annexed in 1878 with their new homes, although many chose to leave for the Ottoman interior.

The Abkhaz diaspora in the Ottoman successor states today bears witness to the scale of these forced migrations; the greatest number live in Turkey, where Abkhaz as a language was last mentioned in the published results of the 1965 census, although due to what seems to have been the customary combination of bureaucratic incompetence and Turkish nationalism, reported numbers were ridiculously low: just 4,563 first- and 7,836 second-language speakers (see Andrews (1989.167)). Another sizeable community lives in Syria, where before 1967 its homes lay mainly on the Golan, from where practically all were driven out by the Israelis. Since World War II, a secondary 'outer' diaspora has sprung up, as *inter alios* Abkhaz from Turkey came to Germany, Golan Abkhaz to the USA etc.; not using Turkish or other non-Russian sources, we shall restrict further remarks on the diaspora to the 'inner' groups inside Russian/Soviet/former Soviet territory.

The departing Abkhaz were replaced by newcomers from all over the Russian Empire and even abroad. The most obvious new arrivals came from Mingrelia, where serfdom had been finally abolished in 1867. Population-densities there were high and many newly freed peasants stranded landless; in Abkhazia, population-density was very low in huge fertile areas, the health hazards of which (like malaria) the neighbouring Mingrelians were additionally better prepared to brave than people from other climes.

The Cameral Description of 1873

After the Russians took military control of the western Caucasus in 1864, it was a long time before they actually established a more or less efficient administration. The numerous figures released after the occupation in any case closely resemble those before in their inexactitude. Of these post-1864 statistics, we want to single out for scrutiny the so-called Cameral Description of 1873. At present I only have results of this in the doctored version which Nikolaus von Seidlitz, an official statistician, wrote for the 1880 volume of a German learned journal. It would be interesting to consult the original results (see Seidlitz 1880.340-347). The German version gives four components for Sukhum territory: the town of Sukhum, the counties of Ochamchira and Pitsunda, and (the prefecture of) Ts'ebelda.

Table 1: Supposed population of the Sukhum territory (1873)

	Sukhum town	Ochamchira	Pitsunda	Ts'ebelda	total
Population	1,500	32,179	7,080	605	41,364
Mingrelians	?	26,475	0	0	26,475
Abkhaz	0	5,700	6,900	605	13,205
Russians	?	0	138	0	138
Turks	0	4	42	0	46
Greeks, Armenians	?	0	0	0	?

In Sukhum town, population is said to consist mainly of Russians, including the garrison, plus some Greek, Armenian and Mingrelian traders. For the whole territory, 64.0% not including those in Sukhum town would have been Mingrelians, just 31.9% Abkhaz. It is strange that, as far as I know, Georgian authors do not use these figures, given their being so well suited to their purpose; the only reason I can see for this is that they have never come across this source. As it is, rounded figures, quite untypical of a source where rounding is not generally employed, nurture suspicion, which is found to be well grounded: the figures are admittedly not those for 1873, having been tampered with, as from a footnote we learn that besides these Abkhaz a further 32,000 plus 847 Kabardians from near Gagra near Pitsunda had emigrated to 'Turkey' (the Ottoman Empire) in the war of 1877/78. This would leave us with a figure of *74,211 for 1873, *45,205 of whom or 60.9% would have been Abkhaz, 35.7% (plus some in Sukhum) Mingrelians.³ The figures only begin to make sense when we realize that the Samurzaq'anoans are here treated as Mingrelians, not Abkhaz. Even so, outside the southern fringe of Abkhazia, i.e., Samurzaq'an(o) (here under Ochamchira), there were practically no Kartvelians, whereas Abkhaz were living all over the territory, except for Sukhum, where they were rarely and barely tolerated by the authorities (although four Abkhaz were reported in Tiflis).

³ A well-known 1895 book that for statistical data relied mainly on the 1886 Family Lists gave the population of Abkhazia as 72,415, of which (it stated) 30,000 were often counted as Mingrelians; this fits well with reconstructed 1873 figures. See Erckert (1895).

The Family Lists of 1886

In 1886, the authorities compiled so-called Family Lists, giving the population of even the tiniest hamlets in Transcaucasia. The figures were published officially in a volume of more than a 1,000 pages (albeit without pagination) in Tiflis in 1893, and there were many subsequent publications. In the *Suxumskij Okrug*, roughly corresponding to modern Abkhazia, 145 settlements are listed, the smallest of which, Pshauri, was reported to have just 13 inhabitants. People are listed according to a) nationalities [*narodnosti*], b) religious affiliation, and c) estates.⁴

Both sexes as well as households are indicated separately for each category. Because of the ease with which this source allowed itself to be falsified by contemporaries who only had to visit a few villages to check the accuracy of the figures, these Family Lists are our first serious source. It is not without its shortcomings, of course: We may suspect that the 11 Shiite Muslims registered in the village of Aradu (1,879 Abkhaz, 5 Mingrelians, no other nationalities) were actually Persians or Tatars (i.e., modern 'Azerbaijanis'), or indeed Alevi Turks or Turkmens, but none such are listed in all the *Okrug*; nor are Ottoman Turks and other groups one strongly suspects did actually live there. Probably these were generally regarded as non-permanent residents and thus excluded.

Table 2: Nationalities in the *Suxumskij Okrug* (1886)

	<i>Samurzaq'an(o)</i> <i>uchastok</i>	<i>K'odor</i> <i>uchastok</i>	<i>Gudauta</i> <i>uchastok</i>	<i>Gumista</i> <i>uchastok</i>	<i>Sukhum</i> <i>town</i>	<i>Ochamchira</i> <i>town</i>	<i>total</i>
Population	30,529	15,821	14,887	6,609	412	515	68,773
Samurzaq'anoans	29,520	1,108	0 (!)	12	0	0	30,640
Abkhaz	0 (!)	14,525	13,404	391	3	0	28,323
Mingrelians ⁵	984	172	41	2,277	84	0	3,558
Greeks	0	0	9	2,047	93	0	2,149
Armenians	0	0	1,037	0	53	0	1,090
Russians	4	0	361	606	119	0	1,090
Estonians	0	0	0	637	0	0	637
Georgians ⁶	0[20]	0[13]	0[29]	0	0	515	515[577]
Germans	0	0	0	245	0	0	245
Moldavians	0	0	0	148	0	0	148
Ukrainians	0	0	0	126	0	0	126
Bulgarians	0	0	0	95	3	0	98
Imeretians ⁵	20[0]	13[0]	29[0]	0	22	0	84[22]
Poles	0	0	1	5	17	0	23

⁴ We concentrate on the first category here, although the other two also merit attention. Tsarist statistics are notorious for over-representing the state church. Of all Samurzaq'anoans and Abkhaz in the *Okrug*, only 7% were listed as Sunni Muslims, 93% as orthodox Christians. See *Svod statisticheskix dannyx o naselenii Zakavkazskago kraja, izvlechennyx iz posemejnyx spiskov 1886 goda*. Tiflis 1893.

⁵ In Sukhum town: 'Mingrelians and Laz'.

⁶ Georgians, Imeretians and Gurians are not neatly separated in all tables (Imeretian is the primary of the western Georgian dialects; Gurian is second in importance). In the village-tables, 62 Georgians are listed, but neither Imeretians or Gurians; overleaf, in a summary-table, we read of 62 Imeretians (and no Georgians). For Sukhum, we find Imeretians and Gurians but no Georgians, and for Ochamchira, 355 Georgians but neither of the other groups. We assume that of all these 608 people, most were actually Imeretians, if not Mingrelians.

Circassians ⁷	1	3	5	7	3	0	19
Jews	0	0	0	4	6	0	10
Latvians	0	0	0	9	0	0	9
Gurians ⁵	0	0	0	0	9	0	9

Comparing '1873' (or rather, 1878) with 1886, we see that Seidlitz took the Samurzaq'anoans for Mingrelians. Whether this and subsequent natural growth of the Abkhaz population bolstered by thousands of returnees is enough to explain his low figure for the Abkhaz, we leave undecided.

It is in any case easy to see that, and why, the Samurzaq'anoans are the bone of contention between Abkhaz and Georgians. According to the Family Lists, they were actually the most numerous group of all. Some (pro-)Abkhaz scholars have stated the percentage of Abkhaz in Abkhazia for 1886 to have been 85.7%; that clearly is an addition of Abkhaz plus Samurzaq'anoans (30,640 + 28,323 = 58,963 or 85.7% of 68,773). On the other hand, some (pro-)Georgian scholars have claimed that actually they, the 'Georgians', were in a majority of 50.6%, clearly arriving at this by adding all Kartvelians (Mingrelians [and some Laz for Sukhum town] + Georgians [including Imeretians and Gurians] to the Samurzaq'anoans (30,640 + 3,558 + 515 + 84 + 9 = 34,806 or 50.6% of 68,773).

Presentation of figures should always be supported by explanation of how they are calculated. While the (pro-)Abkhaz may be criticized for the form they choose, they are quite justified in the essence: the very source itself compiles additional summary tables, and in these, Samurzaq'anoans are not listed, but the number of Abkhaz in *Kutaisskaja Gubernija* is given as 60,432. Now, in Batumi (city and *okrug*), 1,469 Abkhaz were listed; thus 58,963 remain - clearly, these are the Abkhaz plus the Samurzaq'anoans in our *okrug*!

Besides the proof offered by the table, we have additional evidence in the fact that Samurzaq'anoans and Abkhaz are kept apart quite neatly. Only in two villages in Gumista, far from Samurzaq'an(o), are both listed side by side; elsewhere, it is either one or the other: Abkhaz in the rest of Gumista, in Gudauta and in K'odor (minus one large village of Samurzaq'anoans with no Abkhaz), Samurzaq'anoans in Samurzaq'an(o). Clearly the authorities had trouble distinguishing Abkhaz and Samurzaq'anoans⁸, going by territorial divisions instead. On the other hand, they seem to have had little difficulty distinguishing Mingrelians and Samurzaq'anoans, who are regularly listed living side by side.⁹

Finally, look at the sex-ratio of the Kartvelians: 142 males to every 100 females for Mingrelians (incl. a few Laz), 207:100 for Georgians (incl. Imeretians & Gurians). Look also at the restriction of non-Mingrelian Kartvelians to a few settlements (515 in Ochamchira alone, although we suspect some may actually have been Mingrelians; 355 of them male);

⁷ In Sukhum town: 'Kabardians and other Circassian tribes'.

⁸One bibliographical rarity not mentioned in this article is Mach'avariani (1913). This Mingrelian-born Kartvelian, raised in Samurzaq'an(o)/Abkhazia, had been arguing since the 1890s that Samurzaq'anoans were Abkhazians. In 1913 he calculated that Abkhazia's population was 140,000; of these he numbered the Abkhazians at 82,960 (including 33,639 Samurzaq'anoans who deemed themselves to be Abkhazians), making Abkhazians 60% of Abkhazia's population (pp.7, 116, 139, 150, 179) [Editor].

⁹ For a dissenting analysis, see Schuchardt (1897).

combining these facts, one must realise that we are dealing here with a recently arrived settler population.

Outside the *okrug*, the source lists Abkhaz only in *Batumskij Okrug* (554 in the city, 915 in villages), and in one town of the *Karskaja Oblast'* (just 12).

The First All-General Census of 1897

The so-called First All-General Census of Russia, conducted to represent the state of the population as of January 28, 1897 (old style; new, February 9), was the only one ever to cover all the Empire, except the Central Asian protectorate Khanates and the Grand Duchy of Finland. It is strange (but little wonder, considering the unwelcome results) that Georgian scholars often do not even mention this source. Its peculiarity, often ignored, was that no question on nationality was included, questions on language, religion, estate or place of birth serving as partial substitutes. While insisting that it is not synonymous with nationality, we will concentrate on language.

Table 3: Mother tongue [*rodnoj jazyk*] in the *Suxumskij Okrug* (1897)¹⁰

Population	106,179	no language indicated	18
Abkhaz ¹¹	58,697	Avar & Andi Languages ¹²	26
All Kartvelian	25,873	Kjurinian [i.e., Lezgian proper] ¹⁰	21
of which:		Assyrian [i.e., Aramæan]	17
<i>Mingrelian</i>	23,810	Circassian	16
<i>var. Georgian dialects & Laz</i> ¹³	1,830	Chuvash	15
<i>Imeretian [Georgian dialect]</i> ¹¹	141	Ingush	11
<i>Svan</i>	92	Ossetian	11
Armenian	6,552	Bashkir	6
Greek	5,393	Darginian ¹⁰	6
Russian	5,135	English	6
Turkish	1,347	Kumyk	5
Ukrainian	809	Italian	3
Estonian	604	Turkmen	3
German	406	Cheremiss [i.e., Mari]	2
Polish	234	French	2
Persian	186	Kabardian	2
Tatar [incl. modern Tatar & Azerbaijani]	171	Kurdish	2
'Jewish' [i.e., Yiddish] ¹⁴	136	Talysh	2

¹⁰ *Pervaja vseobshchaja perepis' naselenija Rossijskoj imperii*. St. Petersburg 1899 - 1905 [89 vols.].

¹¹ Cross-tabulating language and religion, the source lumps together Abkhaz and the Circassian dialects (i.e., Circassian and Kabardian). Of all 58,715 speakers of Abkhaz (58,697) & Circassian + Kabardian (18) in *Suxumskij Okrug*, 49,367 (84.1%) were registered as orthodox Christians, 9,342 (15.9%) as Muslims, with six others. However misleading, this is the last comprehensive account of Abkhaz nominal religious affiliation.

¹² Note that the classification of Daghestani languages in this census was vastly different from later ones, making comparisons very difficult: Most languages in the Samurian subgroup (other than Lezgian proper, Aghul, Rutul, Tsakhur and Udi) were then included with non-Samurian Lak, as were two of the Dido languages (Hunzib and Bezhta); only Aghul, Rutul and Tsakhur were listed with Lezgian. The other 3 Dido tongues and the 8 Andi languages were listed with Avar. Thus, of all categories, only internally divergent Darginian (including, as today, Kubachi and Kaitak) and Udi are equivalent to those employed today.

¹³ Whereas Imeretian is a Georgian dialect, Laz is not. Of 25,873 Kartvelian speakers, 14 were registered as Jews, 82 as Muslims; these latter would be Adzhars and Laz, with perhaps a few Ingiloans or Meskh(et)ians.

¹⁴ One of these 136 was registered as an orthodox Christian. According to religion, 162 Jews were registered.

Romanian (Moldovan)	133	Abessinian [probably Amharan]	1
Lithuanian	72	Arabic	1
Belorussian	67	Chechen	1
Czech [probably incl. Slovak]	63	Karachay	1
Latvian	51	Kazikumyk [i.e., Lak] & others ¹⁰	1
Bulgarian	38	Mordvinian	1
Kist [Chechen dialect]	31	Udi ¹⁰	1

Looking at tables 2 and 3, we must be careful to avoid one-to-one comparison of *nationality* with *language*. Probably some people earlier listed as Samurzaq'anoans were now registered as Mingrelian by language, although, asked for nationality, they might still have stated 'Samurzaq'anian' or indeed 'Abkhaz': as late as 1926, 8,755 persons in Abkhazia reportedly professed a Kartvelian *mother-tongue* but Abkhaz *nationality* [narodnost']. It is thus hard to tell whether to attribute the numerical decline of 266 (from 58,963 to 58,697), in the absence of large-scale out-migration and allowing for natural growth, to actual mingrelianisation or to the new statistical method. Probably both factors were present.

But the census also tells us of continuing immigration not only of a wide range of groups from further afield, but also indeed of Mingrelians, through the birthplace question. 7,957 persons had been born abroad, 7,610 of them in 'Turkey' alone (Greeks, Armenians, Turks); in all, there were no less than 9,671 foreigners, 9,349 of them subjects of the Porte. Another 6,416 had been born inside the Empire, but outside *Kutaiskaja Gubernija*. These would, for example, include Eastern Slavs, Poles and Balts, of course excepting children already born in the *okrug*. Especially among the 284 people born in *Tiflisskaja Gubernija*, there must have been some Georgian immigrants, too.

Finally, 16,528 persons were born inside the *gubernija* but outside the *okrug*. The *gubernija* was heavily Kartvelian, except for *Artvinskij Okrug* (dominated by Turks) and the industrial city and ethnic hotch-potch of Batumi, itself a magnet for settlers and not likely to send out (m)any. It is thus almost indisputable that almost all the 16,528 non-local Kutaisians in the *okrug* would be Mingrelians, (western) Georgians and Svans, numerically leaving just *9,345 locally born Kartvelians (minus some non-Kartvelians born in Kutaisi, but outside Sukhum, but plus some Kartvelians born outside Kutaisi altogether). It is thus beyond reasonable doubt that at most some 10,000 or so of mother-tongue Kartvelians counted in the *okrug* had actually been born there. These would include assimilated Samurzaq'anoans as well as locally born children of settlers. The sex-ratio of Kartvelian speakers is also revealing: 15,122 males to 10,751 females or 141:100; for Mingrelian alone, it is 131:100, whereas in Mingrelia proper, Zugdidi (101:100) and Senaki (98:100) *uezds*, it shows almost too perfect a balance for male-dominated Caucasia, thus further indicating migration.

Outside Abkhazia, figures in the Batumi area declined dramatically from 1,469 Abkhaz in 1886 to just 687 Abkhaz speakers in 1897 (from 554 to 58 in the city itself). In the 1890s, Abkhaz were forcibly removed by the authorities. Barred from returning to Abkhazia, most emigrated to the Ottoman Empire (see text 26 of Hewitt and Khiba (1997)). In the North

Caucasus, Abkhaz speakers must in the main have been modern-day Abazinians, 12,481 of them in *Kubanskaja Oblast'* alone. Outside these units (*okrugi* Batumi & Sukhum plus *Kubanskaja Oblast'*), the diaspora was just 264 (83 of them elsewhere in Kutaisi) to make it 72,123 speakers of Abkhaz for all the Empire. However, outside Caucasia Abkhaz was generally counted with Circassian, thus there may have been a few more Abkhaz speakers included under that heading.

The Caucasian Calendar

The next good source regularly quoted is the first All-Union Census of 1926. Anything but good, though much quoted, is another source, to which we now turn: the Caucasian Calendar (CC). This yearbook was published under the auspices of the viceroy in Tiflis until 1916, when the final CC for the year 1917 appeared, carrying demographic figures compiled for January 1, 1916 (old style; new, January 14). In the same manner, the CC for 1914, published in 1913, has figures for January 1, 1913, and so forth.

Table 4: Nationalities [*narodnosti*] in the *Suxumskij Okrug* (1913 & 1916)¹⁵

Population	1/I/1913	sex-ratio	permanent	1/I/1916
	181,947	(m.:100 f.)	population	209,700
Russians, orthodox [incl. Ukrainians & Belorussians]	18,043	184:100	66.1%	25,300
Russians, 'sectarians'	54	391:100	100.0%	100
Other European peoples [i.e., Poles, Germans etc.]	13,784	173:100	56.7%	6,600
Kartvelians, orthodox	69,799	158:100	79.2%	49,400
Kartvelians, Muslim [i.e., Laz, Adzhars etc.]	315	(just 3 f.)	(none)	1,000
Armenians, Gregorian [i.e., Armenian apostolic]	13,034	137:100	24.6%	20,700
Armenians, orthodox	37	118:100	100.0%	0
Armenians, other beliefs [i.e., uniate, protestant?]	132	169:100	100.0%	50
Caucasian mountaineers, Muslim	29,186	104:100	79.2%	200
Caucasian mountaineers, other beliefs [?]	16,919	118:100	96.3%	200
Other asiatic peoples, Christians	5,528	112:100	45.1%	103,200
Other asiatic peoples, Shii Muslims	1,597	298:100	34.9%	200
Other asiatic peoples, Sunni Muslims	13,071	676:100	2.4%	2,400
Jews	448	126:100	99.1%	300

Preposterous categories like 'Other Asiatics' are useful for manipulative purposes only. Taken with crude territorial divisions employed (no figures below *uezd* level), these categories make the CC a caricature of ethno-demography. An eye-opener to CC believers should be a 13/16 comparison, my reading of the bewildering data being this: almost all the mountaineers reported in 1913 were actually Abkhaz, as may have been the Christians among the 'Other Asiatics'. In 1916, these three categories were merged as Christian 'Other Asiatics', to which further may have been added thousands of Greeks possibly represented in 1913 under 'Other Europeans' as well as 20,000 or so Samurzaq'anoans listed in 1913 as Kartvelians; finally, thousands of refugees from Anatolia (Greeks?) must have boosted this

¹⁵ *Kavkazskij kalendar' na 1914 god (LIX g)*. Tiflis 1913. I regret I have to quote the figures for 1916 from a rounded German version, as I cannot obtain the originals. See Die Bevölkerung Transkaukasiens. In: *Der Neue Orient* (Berlin), 1918, p. 436. Note that the figures were not derived from a census.

category. Whereas 1886/1897 sources depict the Abkhaz as 93% and 84% orthodox, in 1913 30,000 were Muslims, but almost none in 1916!

Sex-ratios are again revealing: even among the permanent Christian Kartvelian population, the quota is more than 144 males to 100 females. In the light of the CC's defects, the practice of short quotations from it is not helpful and should be abandoned. A detailed study of all CC figures on Abkhazia would of course be very welcome.

The Agricultural Census of 1917

In 1917, the Provisional Government ordered an Agricultural and Soil Census to be completed by September 1, following the tsarist one in 1916; results appeared in 1923.

Table 5: Samurzaq'an(o)	K'odor	Gudauta	Gumista	Suxumskij	
<i>uchastok</i>	<i>uchastok</i>	<i>uchastok</i>	<i>uchastok</i>	<i>Okrug</i>	
Population	42,201	26,581	25,106	37,347	131,235
Georg. (all Kartv.)	40,959	3,882	276	9,643	54,760
Abkhaz	1,161	20,022	17,993	739	39,915
Greeks	18	375	1,160	15,727	17,280
Armenians	0	2,227	4,386	7,224	13,837
Russians	27	21	1,221	1,365	2,634
Germans	0	0	0	339	339
Persians	0	0	22	0	22
Jews	0	9	0	5	14
Others	36	45	48	2,305	2,434

A decline of the population from 209,700 in 1916 to 131,235 in the summer of 1917, thus *before* the war started in earnest for Abkhazia, is unlikely. Actually, as an explanation it is quite unnecessary, as after all it was an *agricultural* census that excluded urban populations. Thus, the percentage of both Kartvelians and Abkhaz is here high, as they were concentrated on the land, the Abkhaz even more so. As late as 1917, Kartvelians were still heavily outnumbered in K'odor, Gudauta (by Abkhaz) and Gumista (by other settlers, especially Greeks), forming an overwhelming majority only in tiny Samurzaq'An(o), where it is of course only explained by another switch in the way the Samurzaq'anoans were listed: once again as Kartvelians.¹⁶

¹⁶ Figures are from *Pouezdnye itogi Vserossijskoj sel'sko-xozjajstvennoj i pozemel'noj perepisi 1917 goda*. Moscow 1923, and from *Zakavkaz'e. Statistiko-ekonomičeskij sbornik*. Tiflis 1925.

Two typical examples from the press of the period

Exactly as the supply of reliable information dried up, with the U-boat actions, landings, uprisings, revolutions, counter-revolutions and civil war of 1917/22, demand for figures reached an all-time high, and even after the demise of what little of doubtful use the collapsed administration had offered in the form of the CC, supplies for this brisk demand were not slow in coming forth. Figures one finds in archives or print for the period at inspection turn out to be at best mangled repetitions of the CC.

Thus *Kavkazskoe Slovo* reported in its No. 107 of May 29, 1918, that Georgia had 2,761,000 inhabitants, of whom 4.6% were Abkhaz; that would imply some 127,000 Abkhaz! Perhaps this is a result of faulty calculations based on the CC. Even more remarkably, *Vozrozhdenie* had this to offer in its No. 104 of June 1: 'In Sukhum, there were 180,000 natives: 50,000 Abkhaz, 60,000 Mingrelians, 70,000 Georgians; besides, 20,000 Greeks, 22,000 Armenians, 16,000 Estonians and 12,000 others'¹⁷.

The All-Georgian Census of 1922/23

Before the Soviets conducted their first All-Union Census (1926), they carried out a number of restricted censuses, e.g. an urban census in 1923, which was explicitly not held in Georgia, because one had just taken place there on November 30, 1922. Rural parts followed in 1923 to conclude the first and only All-Georgian Census in Soviet times. As late as 1925, the results on the nationalities in the rural population had not been officially published. My best guess is they actually never were. With the publication of the first All-Union Census, the All-Georgian Census *de facto* became unquotable. What little had been published was regularly ignored.

Table 6: Towns (1922)	Gal	Ochamchira	Gudauta	Sukhum	urban pop.¹⁸
<u>Population</u>	230	2,669	2,843	17,426	23,168
Georgians (all Kartv.)	223	1,576	612	3,706	6,117
Greeks	0	251	720	4,992	5,963
Russians	3	171	711	4,467	5,352
Armenians	1	78	304	1,889	2,272
Abkhaz	0	453	186	426	1,065
Jews	0	5	9	1,012	1,026
Persians	0	0	44	203	247
Poles	0	0	39	204	243
Germans	0	0	31	127	158
Azerbaijani Turks	0	0	12	5	17
Ossetians	0	0	0	10	10
Other Caucasians	0	0	4	12	16
Others	3	135	171	373	682

¹⁷ Both papers are quoted according to German intelligence reports as reported in Bihl (1992.312f.).

¹⁸ There were additionally small numbers of Abkhaz in other cities across Georgia: 225 in Batumi, 71 in Tiflis, 4 in Kutaisi, 2 in Poti, and 1 in Ljuksemburg (modern Bolnisi). The source is *Zakavkaz'e* (op. cit.).

Georgians (i.e., Kartvelians) had a plurality of just a good quarter of the urban population in 1922. If we add these figures to those of the rural population from the Agricultural Census of 1917, we find that Kartvelians (including the Samurzaq'anoans) would make up just 39.4% of the population of Abkhazia, whereas the Abkhaz (without the Samurzaq'anoans) would numerically still be 26.5% of the population.

In 1926, the first volume of the Great Soviet Encyclopædia was printed, including the entry for the Abkhaz SSR (note in passing that at the time nominally it was not, as erroneously or mischievously often stated, an ASSR, but an SSR). This entry mentions the population of the five *uezd* centres, Sukhum (17,426), Ochamchira (2,920), Gudauta (2,834), Gagra (1,075), and Gal (849). Whereas the figure for Gudauta may be a misprint for 2,843, the figure for Sukhum is clearly derived from the Census of November 30, 1922; the differences for Ochamchira and Gal may be explained by administrative expansion of both towns between 1922/23 and 1926.¹⁹

Besides these figures, the entry gives figures for the whole population of Abkhazia, stating that out of a population of 174,126, 83,794 and thus 'around 50%' (actually 48.1%) were Abkhaz, Georgians 18.4%, Greeks 12.8%, Armenians 10.2%, Russians 5.9%, Persians 2.2% and others, including Jews, Estonians, Germans, Turks and Poles, less than 1% (each). Put into absolute figures, we thus receive this picture:

Table 7: Population of Abkhazia according to the Great Soviet Encyclopædia (for 1922/23?)

Population	174,126	lowest possible	highest possible
Abkhaz	83,794	-	-
Georgians (18.4%)	*32,039	31,953	32,126
Greeks (12.8%)	*22,288	22,202	22,375
Armenians (10.2%)	*17,761	17,674	17,847
Russians (5.9%)	*10,273	10,187	10,360
Persians (2.2%)	*3,831	3,744	3,917
others (each 1%)	*4,140	3,707	4,572

I actually suspect that the figures stem from the census of 1922/23 (as obviously does the figure for, say, Sukhum), although proof is lacking, and they may well be from another source, as yet unknown. Be that as it may, according to the most authoritative source imaginable, where not a single word was printed without approval from the highest bodies, Abkhaz once again heavily outnumbered Kartvelians as late as 1926. Obviously, the Samurzaq'anoans were here once again counted as Abkhaz.

The All-Union Census of 1926

In discussions of the first All-Union Census of (17 December) 1926, the foreign subjects are regularly forgotten. That is a pity, as at 7.5% of the population (15,012 persons) they were more important here than anywhere else in the USSR except for the Far East, where

¹⁹ *Bol'shaja Sovetskaja Èntsiklopedija*, 1st ed., Vol. I, Moscow 1926, entry 'Abxazskaja SSR'.

foreigners made up 8.2%. To avoid confusion, we follow the custom of listing only Soviet citizens, but add foreigners in brackets.

Table 8: Nationalities [*narodnosti*] in the Abkhaz SSR (1926)²⁰

Population: 186,004 Soviet citizens +15,012 foreigners, thus 201,016

Georgians, i.e. Kartvelians	(+509) 67,494	Ossetians	20
of whom:		Assyrians [i.e., Aramæans]	(+1) 19
Mingrelians	(+1) 40,989	Czechs & Slovaks	(+1) 16
Georgians proper	24,576	Mordwinians	13
Svans	1,875	Central Asian Jews	11
Laz	(+508) 42	Hungarians	(+4) 10
Adzhars	12	Circassians	10
Abkhaz	(+4) 55,918	Albanians	(+1) 9
Armenians	(+2,323) 25,677	French	(+1) 9
Greeks	(+10,802) 14,045	Romanians	8
Russians	(+1) 12,553	Finns	7
Ukrainians	(+1) 4,647	Chinese	7
Ottoman Turks	(+652) 1,115	Karelians	5
Estonians	779	Mountain Jews	4
Jews	702	Komi	4
Germans	(+478) 672	Karachays	3
Belorussians	406	Uzbeks	3
Poles	(+7) 357	Chuvash	3
[Azerbaijani] Turks	(+68) 276	Kalmyks	3
Georgian Jews	215	Chechens	2
Crimean Jews	152	Ingush	2
Persians	(+145) 147	Swedes	2
Bulgarians	(+1) 127	Dutch	2
Latvians	(+1) 112	Kabardians	1
Moldovans	(+1) 97	Kirghiz	1
Lithuanians	(+3) 57	Gypsies	1
Kazakhs	54	Udmurts	1
Karaims	(+1) 39	Finns of Leningrad	1
Italians	(+3) 30	Serbians	(+1) 1
Tatars	29	Britons	(+2) 1
Lezgians [probably incl. var. Daghestani groups]	22	<i>others</i>	(+1) 4
Kurds	22	<i>no nationality indicated</i>	77

Omitting the foreigners thus means playing down the size of the Greek (by more than 10,000 people), Armenian, Ottoman Turk, Laz, German, Persian and (Azerbaijani) Turk communities. Of 550 Laz, only 42 were Soviet citizens.

Comparing figures from the Encyclopædia (1926) and the 1926 census, the Abkhaz decrease by 27,876, whereas the Kartvelians increase by something like *35,455! Clearly, the Samurzaq'anoans, some 30,000 or so, are once again listed as Kartvelians; that Abkhaz losses are somewhat lower and Kartvelian gains somewhat higher may easily be explained by natural growth for both plus some immigration for the Kartvelians. Very useful is a look at a combination of some language/nationality figures:

²⁰ *Vsesojuznaja perepis' naselenija 1926 goda*. Moscow 1928 - 1933 [56 vols.].

Table 9: Nationality and mother-tongue in the Abkhaz SSR (1926, Soviet citizens only)

Nationality	----- Mother tongue -----					
	Mingrelian	Abkhaz	Georgian	Svan	Laz	others
Abkhaz	8,736	47,053	19	0	0	110
Mingrelians	40,228	78	542	1	2	138
Georgians proper	17,412	36	6,957	1	0	170
Svans	10	0	4	1,860	0	1
Laz	0	4	0	0	17	21
Adzhars	0	0	6	0	0	6

Table 9 in two ways significantly enlarges and changes the picture of table 8. We learn that 15.6% of all listed Abkhaz actually had Mingrelian listed as their mother-tongue. This obviously represents a strong hint on mingrelianisation, past and ongoing. No less significant: 70.8% of all 'Georgians' proper have Mingrelian registered as their mother-tongue. Thus, we may safely assume, they were Mingrelians who (out of a mixture of inclination towards their own 'high culture', which for long had been Georgian, and of nationalist pressure, the balance of which factors we are not in a position to decide) declared themselves 'Georgians'. The number of Kartvelians giving Georgian as their mother-tongue is just 7,509 (undoubtedly, western dialects would here predominate), or 3.7% of the population of Abkhazia, if that: some of those Mingrelians more strongly influenced (or pressured) by Georgian nationalism may have given both Georgian nationality and Georgian language, as seems quite possible. The figure for Georgians would then have to be further lowered accordingly. Using the language-data, we can see two processes at work: linguistic mingrelianisation of part of the Abkhaz and ideological georgianisation of part of the Mingrelians. When we compare 47,307 first-language speakers of Abkhaz (including non-Abkhaz) registered in Abkhazia in 1926 with 58,697 counted in 1897, we see how assimilation and the upheaval of 1917/22 have taken their toll. The census-results for 1926 contain a list of nationalities by village-soviet (95 of them plus 4 towns) virtually inviting a detailed comparison with the Family Lists of 1886, which space however does not permit here; we restrict ourselves to *uezd* level and to juxtaposing Kartvelians and Abkhaz.

Table 10: Uezd figures (1926)

	Sukhum	Gal	Gudauta	K'odor	Gagra	Abkhazia
Population	77,097	50,086	30,800	33,086	9,947	201,016
All Kartvelians	20,619	36,802	1,374	6,762	1,934	67,491 ²¹
<i>of whom:</i>						
<i>Mingrelians</i>	14,739	19,018	579	5,729	924	40,989
<i>Georg., Adzh., Laz</i>	4,068	17,748	?	?	?	(24,630)
<i>Svans</i>	1,812	36	?	?	?	(1,875)
Abkhaz	2,189	12,963	17,846	21,762	1,158	55,918

Gal is the only *uezd* dominated by Kartvelians; however, dominance is nothing like that supposed in the Agricultural Census of 1917, where 'Georgians' nominally made up 40,959 of

²¹ The discrepancy between Republic (67,494) and *uezd* results (67,491) is that of the source.

42,201 rural inhabitants of Samurzaq'an(o) *uchastok* (as Gal *uezd* then was). The Abkhaz, then just 1,161 of them, are again a substantial 12,963. What we see here is that the final statistical assimilation of the Samurzaq'anoans is not yet complete. In 1926, only 5,295 persons in all Gal *uezd* had Abkhaz listed as their mother-tongue. Numerically, something like *7,668 Abkhaz in this *uezd* alone thus had Kartvelian languages. In only six village-soviets of the *uezd* was Abkhaz mother-tongue to more than a 100 people (led by Bedia I at 1,673). The next stages were that kartvelophone Abkhaz became Mingrelians, whereas several of the still abkhazophone Abkhaz villages (including Bedia I) were administratively separated from Gal and joined to K'odor, thus completing the mingrelianisation of Gal *uezd* (see Lezhava (1989.20f.)). It should be added that in Gal, pressure on the Mingrelians was also high. Although officially only 574 people spoke Georgian as first language, numerically *17,748 people were listed as Georgians proper, a figure which may include some (at most 54) Adzhars and Laz. Thus, while almost 8,000 Abkhaz were linguistically mingrelianised, more than 17,000 Mingrelians were ideologically georgianised in Gal *uezd* alone (note that we do not know which part of the process was of their own choosing).²²

The census provides another glimpse of the diaspora: in the USSR, there were reportedly 56,957 Abkhaz; 110 were listed outside Georgia, 929 inside Georgia but outside Abkhazia (of which 779 in Adzharistan around Batumi, and 72 in Tiflis).

The All-Union Censuses of 1937 and 1939

In 1932 the USSR experienced a census I have seen dubbed 'experimental' at a later time.²³ Perhaps it was; or else it received the name only after misfiring one way or the other, to justify that results were not published. Be that as it may, they never were, as happened for a half-century with the next census of (6 January) 1937. Published data for this from 1990/91, while duly noting the ethnic composition of every *oblast'* in the RSFSR, still fail to give a nationality-breakdown for Abkhazia.

Abkhaz numbered just 55,561 in the USSR (55,409 of them in Georgia). Thus, from 1926 to 1937, the Abkhaz in the USSR reportedly declined from 56,957 to 55,561; a net loss of 1,396 or 2.3% only, but still astonishing when compared to the quarter million (15.2%) growth of neighbouring Kartvelians.²⁴ This is the period when Abkhazia was demoted to ASSR status (1931) and separate Mingrelian, Svan, Laz (by 1937) and Adzhar (1939) identities were abolished (besides, 21,471 Georgian Jews were listed in the USSR in 1926, but just 10 (!) in 1937; by 1939, they were listed as Jews or Georgians, as the category disappeared). We cannot dwell on these matters here, but certainly this is a context to be remembered: it means that Samurzaq'anoans who had personally opted to declare themselves

²² In the 'Dictionary of Nationalities' (*Slovar' narodnostej*) that accompanied the census results (see e.g. vol. XIV), the Samurzaq'anoans were (still) listed as a subgroup of the Abkhaz.

²³ Consult *Polveka molchanija [Vsesojuznaja perepis' naselenija 1937 g.]*. In: *Sociologicheskie issledovanija* (Moscow) 17 (1990), No. 7, pp. 50-70, referring to 1932: p. 54.

²⁴ *Vsesojuznaja perepis' naselenija 1937 g[oda]*. *Kratkie itogi*. Moscow 1991, and *Vsesojuznaja perepis' naselenija 1937 goda. Iz arxivov Goskomstata SSSR*. In: *Vestnik Statistiki* (Moscow), 1990, pp. 65-79.

or been reclassified as Mingrelians were *in toto* reclassified as Georgians. Results of the (17 January) 1939 census were also published restrictedly. Only in the 1990s did we get fuller accounts.

Table 11:²⁵

	Abkhazia, 1926	Abkhazia, 1939	growth, Abkhazia	growth, USSR
<u>Population</u>	201,016	311,885	55.2%	-
Georgians (all Kartvelians)	67,494	91,967	36.3%	23.5%
Russians	12,553	60,201	379.6%	28.0%
Abkhaz	55,918	56,197	0.5%	3.6%
Armenians	25,677	49,705	93.6%	37.3%
Greeks	14,045	34,621	146.5%	34.0%

The growth of the Abkhaz population is small, whereas other groups experienced dramatic immigration, Russians now outnumbering Abkhaz. Kartvelian immigration was not very strong from 1926 to 1939, growth being just some *8,500 faster than would be expected through natural growth as experienced by all Kartvelians; part of this growth may be explained by continued assimilation of Abkhaz, especially of those 8,755 or so (in Abkhazia) who had Kartvelian mother-tongues listed in 1926. However, of all 59,003 Abkhaz in the USSR, still only 52,347 had Abkhaz listed as their mother-tongue (808 Russian, 5,878 other languages, including Kartvelian ones). Interestingly, 670 non-Abkhaz had Abkhaz listed as their mother-tongue.

For the first time since emigration across the Black Sea petered out, we have strong out-migration of Abkhaz. 2,806 were registered outside Abkhazia, 1,608 of these inside Georgia, but already 1,198 elsewhere, compared to just 152 in 1937.

The All-Union Census of 1959

Between 1939 and the All-Union Census of (15 January) 1959, the picture was again changed by force. Most of the Greeks (especially those, called Urum, who spoke Turkish) were collectively deported during the war, as were others, including some Abkhaz. Reclassification continued apace, sometimes influenced by fear of deportation. Thus, several Laz families reportedly escaped a cold war deportation in 1949 by passing themselves off as Abkhaz (communication by Wolfgang Feurstein); possibly some Greeks for similar reasons 'became' Georgians or Russians. In this period the Abkhaz (surpassed also by Armenians in 1959) were under immense pressure of georgianisation, their cultural institutions being all but destroyed. We cannot here deal with sources mentioning Kartvelians being, often against their will, dumped in truckloads by Beria's henchmen in the Abkhazian countryside. The figures speak for themselves and bolster the reports: the rise of the Georgians cannot be explained by natural growth and the assimilation of some Abkhaz and possibly some Greeks; there must have been significant immigration as well. Numerically, there were *48,172

²⁵ *Vsesojuznaja perepis' naselenija 1939 goda: Osnovnye itogi*. Moscow 1992. The Greek figure for 1939 may include some of the 10,802 foreign Greeks not included in the 1926 total. Note that 1939 figures generally seem high: 2,097,169 Kartvelians incl. 88,230 Adzhars were listed for 1937, but 2,249,636 (+7.3%) for 1939.

Kartvelians more in Abkhazia in 1959 than would be expected through natural growth since 1939, given that overall rates were similar.

Table 12:²⁶

	Abkhazia, 1939	Abkhazia, 1959	growth, Abkhazia	growth, USSR
Population	311,885	404,738	29.8%	-
Georgians (all Kartvelians)	91,967	158,221	72.0%	19.7%
Russians	60,201	86,715	44.0%	14.6%
Armenians	49,705	64,425	29.6%	29.5%
Abkhaz	56,197	61,193	8.9%	10.9%
Greeks	34,621	9,101	Đ73.7%	8.0%

The All-Union Censuses of 1970, 1979 and 1989

The nearer we come to the present, the more there is consensus - albeit on the facts of demography only. We will thus treat the figures for (15 January) 1970, (17 January) 1979 and (12 January) 1989 together.²⁷

Table 13: Population of Abkhazia

	1959	1970	1979	1989
Population	404,738	486,959	486,082	525,061
Georgians (all Kartvelians)	158,221	199,595	213,322	239,872
Abkhaz	61,193	77,276	83,097	93,267
Armenians	64,425	74,850	73,350	76,541
Russians	86,715	92,889	79,730	74,914
Greeks	9,101	13,114	13,642	14,664
Abkhaz diaspora outside_	2,552	3,791	5,630	9,455
and inside Georgia	1,685	2,173	2,188	2,586
(of whom in Adzharia)	(1,157)	(1,361)	(1,508)	(1,636)

By 1979, immigration of Russians and Armenians had turned to net out-migration, offsetting natural growth and still heavy Kartvelian net immigration to result in an actual decline in overall population between 1970 and 1979. Abkhaz out-migration also accelerated; by 1989, only 88.6% of all Soviet Abkhaz were living in Abkhazia. Outside Georgia, there were 7,239 in the RSFSR, 990 in the Ukraine, 333 in Kazakhstan, 163 in Azerbaijan, 149 in Belarus, 129 in Uzbekistan, 102 in Armenia, 90 in Latvia, 63 in Turkmenistan, 52 in Kirghizia, 51 in Moldova, 44 in Tajikistan, and 25 each in Estonia and Lithuania.²⁸

A few words may be appropriate on linguistic assimilation. In 1989, of 105,308 Abkhaz 98,448 claimed Abkhaz as mother-tongue, 5,135 admitted Russian and 1,725 named other languages. As this has to be taken with a grain of salt (the true extent of linguistic

²⁶ *Itogi vsesojuznoj perepisi naselenija 1959 goda. SSSR. Svodnyj tom.* Moscow 1962.

²⁷ *Itogi vsesojuznoj perepisi naselenija 1970 goda. Tom IV. Natsional'nyj sostav_ Moscow 1973; Chislennost' i sostav naselenija SSSR. Po dannym vsesojuznoj perepisi 1979 goda.* Moscow 1984; *Natsional'nyj sostav naselenija SSSR. Po dannym vsesojuznoj perepisi naselenija 1989 goda.* Moscow 1991. The figure for Abkhaz in Adzharia in 1979 & 1989 (preliminary) are from the Tbilisi daily *Zarja Vostoka* (23 March 1990, p. 2).

²⁸ Diaspora-figures are from *Vestnik Statistiki* (Moscow), 1990 (Nos. 10 Đ 12) and 1991 (Nos. 4 Đ 6).

russification being certainly larger, if not dramatic), we refrain from going into detail; as for the present, reliable statistical data later than for 1989 are not available to me.

Conclusion

As stated at the outset, demography has many aspects. We hope to have proven this at least, if nothing else. If one deals with the ethno-demography of Abkhazia, it is not enough merely to state that Abkhaz numbered just 17.8% of the population in 1989, whereas 'Georgians' numbered 45.7%. Historical processes must be interpreted.

There are at least five (in themselves complex) phenomena to be studied: the net out-migration of Abkhaz; the immigration of Kartvelians (until the recent war); the assimilation of the intermediary group of Samurzaq'anoans, who may have been either Abkhaz or Mingrelians originally, by the Mingrelians; the inner-Kartvelian ideological georgianisation especially of the Mingrelians; and the movements (of bodies and minds) of other groups. While we have reasonably good studies for all processes, it is a comprehensive view on all phenomena that alone can help explain the bewildering data of canonical and non-canonical sources alike. We may refer to the fact that Greeks may at times have been counted with the Abkhaz (CC for 1917), at others partly with the 'Georgians' (1959).

Surely, the picture is not as simple as both sides, Georgians and Abkhaz alike, try to paint it, although the Abkhaz naturally have the stronger position, as no-one in their right mind can deny the Abkhaz majority upto 1878.

The Samurzaq'anian problem as the heart of the matter takes us to the limits of what ethno-demography, relying on official Russian sources, can achieve. Surely here another complementary approach, using all available sources in any language, but also (where still possible) methods of oral history, ought to be employed to augment our knowledge.