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The present collection addresses a broad range of questions connected with the history of Abkhazia in the Soviet period.

The Study of the History of Abkhazia in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries During the 1930s to the Early 1950s

At the turn of the 1930s in Abkhazia, as throughout the Soviet Union, the "Marxist-Leninist" theory of formational socio-economic development established itself in historical scholarship as the only correct one, and a Marxist school of historians began to take shape. Anatoly Vsevolodovich Fadeev is regarded as the first Marxist historian in Abkhazia; he began publishing actively from the early 1930s. The earliest of his published works is a small book of forty pages, *On the Question of Feudalism in Abkhazia*[1], which is considered the first Marxist work on the history of Abkhazia. For all its ideological colouring, it contains a good deal of interest. Seeking to prove that the history of Abkhazia had passed through every stage of socio-economic development, Fadeev attacked those who held that Abkhazia had known no sharp social contradictions, that feudal relations were foreign to it and had been brought in only with the consolidation of Russian tsarism.[2]

At the same time the author himself observes that survivals of clan and tribal relations remained strong in Abkhazia. Discussing the peculiarities of Abkhazian feudalism, he points to a whole series of distinctive features: the weak development of the productive forces, agrarian survivals of the clan order and so on. Feudal property did arise in Abkhazia, he argues, yet the exploitation of the peasantry never took extreme forms there. The peasants retained the right of ownership over their land and movable property, and every cultivator acquired land by clearing forest. The Abkhaz feudal lords, the author writes, drew their principal wealth through extra-economic coercion. Serfdom in its pure form did not exist in feudal Abkhazia, Fadeev maintains, first because it was economically unprofitable given the abundance of free land and the rudimentary state of agricultural technique, and second because elements of the clan order had embedded themselves firmly in the fabric of Abkhazian feudalism and restrained the lords' inclination to enserf the peasants. For this reason feudal Abkhazia (before the Russian period) presents peasants who were neither serfs nor free men, but personally dependent. That personal dependence was not uniform: some rendered the surplus product in the natural form of labour service (the *ahuyu*), others (the *anhayu*) in kind and in personal services.

There follow characterisations of the various groups of peasants: the anhayu, the ahuyu and the *atwy* (slaves). All of them, the author finds, were dependent on the feudal lords in one degree or another, but the dependence of the free or "pure" peasants (*anhayu tsky*) was masked beneath a shell of patriarchal clan relations. Among such survivals he counts the fostering of the lords' children, the peasant's freedom to pass from one master to another, his possession of a holding of his own and the like. At the same time he sets out the obligations that the pure peasants (anhayu) were bound to perform.[3]

As for the ahuyu, the author explains that these were the descendants of slaves who, as they shed their servile condition, passed into the ahuyu class. Fadeev describes their obligations and concludes that they were in essence corvée serfs.

In the next chapter of the work the author describes the political structure of Abkhazian feudalism: its classes and social estates, the feudal organs of coercion and the clan survivals that acted as a brake on the excessive exploitation of the peasants, the system of government, the ideological superstructure and the external relations of Abkhazia. Little known though it is today, this work proved of great consequence, since its central propositions were later consolidated in other works, by Fadeev himself and by other authors, and supplied the basic framework for the study of the socio-economic history of nineteenth-century Abkhazia.

Fadeev gave close attention to the Lykhny uprising and to the peasant reform in Abkhazia, devoting several works to the theme.[4]

In 1932 there appeared his next work, *Russian Tsarism and the Peasant Reform in Abkhazia*[5], which, as the author himself notes, continues his earlier pamphlet *On the Question of Feudalism in Abkhazia*. In the spirit of the conception then dominant in Soviet historical scholarship, Fadeev characterises Russian tsarism as military-feudal imperialism. The principal aims he sets the work are to demonstrate the class character of the peasant reform of 1870 in Abkhazia, to identify the historical forces that brought about the collapse of Abkhazian feudalism, and to lay bare the social essence of Abkhazia's transformation into a colony of Russian capitalism. He begins by exposing the full cruelty of tsarist colonial oppression in Abkhazia from the moment of annexation, and observes that tsarism found allies for itself among the Abkhaz feudal nobility, above all in the person of the ruling prince.

Particular attention is given in the work to the economic colonisation of Abkhazia. It is precisely with this task that Fadeev connects mass mahajirism (the muhajir exodus), since a freedom-loving population stood in the way of Russian capital, which required the ground to be cleared for the development of capitalism. He points to a coincidence of interests between tsarism and Russia's young commercial and industrial bourgeoisie in the expulsion of the Abkhaz population: for tsarism, mahajirism meant the complete political subjugation of the region; for the bourgeoisie, it opened the way to Abkhazia's economic colonisation. The reform, the author argues, far from easing the peasants' position, brought a marked deterioration in the life of the indigenous inhabitants. Alongside the conquering policy of tsarism and the peasant reform, and as their consequence, mass mahajirism, Fadeev also named the mass colonisation of Abkhazia. The attempt to attract prosperous market gardeners from Yaroslavl province and colonists from Bulgaria, he records, came to nothing,

while a stream of Greek and Armenian settlers poured into Abkhazia from Anatolia, followed later by Russians and others.[6] Among the settlers the author does not mention the Kartvelians (Georgians, Mingrelians and Svans), an omission that was probably deliberate: Abkhazia had shortly before been incorporated into Georgia, and the campaign proclaiming Abkhazia a historic part of Georgia was already under way. In those circumstances it was becoming unsafe to speak of Georgian settlers.

A new work by Fadeev, *A Short Outline of the History of Abkhazia*[7], appeared in 1934. The publication represents one of the first attempts at a systematic exposition of the history of Abkhazia from the earliest times to the second half of the nineteenth century. Its preface offered one of the first historiographical analyses of a number of books on the history of Abkhazia written both before the revolution and in the years of Soviet power. It discussed the works of N. Dubrovin, P. Uslar and A. Dyachkov-Tarasov, together with those of contemporary Abkhaz authors, S. Basaria, S. Ashkhatsava, D. Gulia and K. Kudryavtsev, which were once again subjected to severe criticism.[8]

As for the history of the nineteenth century itself, the *Short Outline* is written entirely in the spirit of the theories then prevailing. The very title of the chapter devoted to the period speaks for itself: "The Seizure of Abkhazia by Russian Tsarism".

The author rates the activity of Kelesh-bey very highly, and draws an interesting conclusion about the period that followed his murder. "The internecine strife between Kelesh-bey's sons, Safar-bey and Aslan-bey, provokes a political crisis in the country, which ends with the seizure of Abkhazia by Russian tsarism."[9] In the same spirit of the implacable hostility then required towards the feudal and capitalist order, and of the church's pernicious role, he assesses the articles of petition addressed by Safar-bey (Georgy) to the Emperor Alexander I:

> In this letter the physiognomy of the feudal predator and exploiter stands out clearly: a man who feared, through his defeat in the struggle with other feudal lords, to lose the lion's share in the exploitation of the Abkhaz peasantry. Characteristic too is the mention of Archpriest Ioseliani; the treacherous role of the church in the seizure of Abkhazia by Russian tsarism is revealed in all its clarity.
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> …The feudal lords and the priests opened the doors of Abkhazia to Russian "military-feudal imperialism".

Turning to the first years of Abkhazia's annexation to Russia, Fadeev pointed to the significant part played by the Mingrelian princes in the process, noting that Dadiani was Safar-bey's ally in the struggle against Aslan-bey and seized Samurzakan as his reward for that support.[10] The author stresses that the colonial policy of Russian tsarism produced a general decline, indeed degradation, of the economy in the first half of the nineteenth century. As an illustration he quotes from a report by the commander of the Black Sea Coastal Line, General N. N. Raevsky, who wrote of Sukhum in 1840:

> In the time of Turkish rule three thousand families made up the population of the town that surrounded the fortress. It contained fertile gardens and numerous bazaars. Sukhum was a rich, healthy, cheerful trading town on the finest bay of the Transcaucasian region. The Chandar stream, divided among channels lined with stone, gave fresh water everywhere for the watering of the gardens and the other needs of the inhabitants… This is its present condition: the population has scattered, the gardens have been felled, the buildings have collapsed to the last one, the fortress walls have cracked and threaten to fall… The channels along which the water flowed have crumbled and become overgrown with brush.
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> The putrid water in which the ruins of the houses moulder has no outflow and remains until it evaporates in the intense heat. To complete the picture, no longer ago than last year I found that the fortress ditch, scarcely cleaned since our occupation of Sukhum, had filled with all the filth of the fortress, thrown into it through the embrasures, and, in a state of constant fermentation, charged the air with putrid exhalations…[11]

Everywhere and at every turn, it was asserted, Russian soldiers carried serfdom and feudal bondage on their bayonets. The local feudal lords Fadeev regarded as accomplices of the tsarist autocracy, men who sold the national independence of their country for the sake of class solidarity with Russian "military-feudal imperialism". From this vision of the historical process he concluded that Abkhazia's national struggle against tsarism very soon became a class struggle of the labouring masses of the peasantry against the ruling prince and the great feudal lords who had sold themselves to the Russian tsar.[12]

Dwelling on the popular uprisings of the 1820s to 1840s and on the punitive expeditions of the tsarist troops, Fadeev once more underlines their class character. A separate chapter is devoted to the peasant reform of 1870, in which the author shows the close bond between the nascent bourgeoisie and the tsarist autocracy and the ever intensifying exploitation of Abkhazia's population and natural wealth. Mahajirism he ties not only to the desire of tsarism and the military-feudal circles to secure these territories for themselves once and for all, but also to the ambition of bourgeois circles to clear the Caucasus of its unsubmissive elements for good and turn it into their colony.

Fadeev rightly connects the Lykhny uprising of 1866 with the attempt to carry out the peasant reform in Abkhazia. The Lykhny uprising receives particular attention, and not only as the largest popular rising of the nineteenth century. Examining the peasant reform in detail, Fadeev again lays the main stress on its class character. The reform, he observes, did not improve but on the contrary worsened the position of the local peasantry. With this he connects the fresh rising of the Abkhaz peasants in 1877, during the Russo-Turkish war, and the further wave of mahajirism that followed it.

As in the earlier *Russian Tsarism and the Peasant Reform in Abkhazia*, Fadeev stresses that the consequence of mahajirism was the colonisation of Abkhazia by an incoming alien element, yet once again, probably for the same reasons, the Georgians do not figure among the settlers listed: Greeks, Armenians, Russians and others.

For a time after its appearance the *Short Outline of the History of Abkhazia* was used quite widely, but then, first because of the sharp criticism directed at its author and later because of the falsifications of Abkhazian history that had begun, the book passed almost entirely out of circulation.

Later, once de-Stalinisation had begun, it briefly returned to life, but a number of factual and partly contrived shortcomings meant that it again came to be used only rarely.

Several more works by Fadeev on various questions of Abkhazian history, chiefly of the nineteenth century, appeared in the 1930s. Among them are the articles "The Peasant Uprising of 1866", included in the second volume of the proceedings of the Abkhazian Research Institute of Regional Studies (AbNIIK), and "The Peasant Reform in Abkhazia", published in the Izvestiya of the USSR Academy of Sciences. His most significant work of the period, though, is the long article "The Ubykhs in the Liberation Movement in the Western Caucasus".[13]

This is very nearly the first and the only work in Soviet historiography devoted to the Ubykhs, a people who vanished without trace in the crucible of the Caucasian War. G. A. Dzidzaria's article on the Ubykhs, written in the late 1940s, came out only very recently, in the third volume of his collected works[14], and L. I. Lavrov's monograph *The Ubykhs*, unpublished in the author's lifetime, later still.[15]

Fadeev's study contains a great deal of material on the ethnography of the Ubykhs, but its particular concern is their struggle against Russian expansion in the Caucasus and the important part this small people played in the wider fight of the Western Caucasus for independence. Much space is given to the activity of the famous Ubykh leader Hadji Berzek and to other members of that Ubykh house, Kerantukh Berzek among them.

The closing stage of the Russo-Caucasian war is described in particular detail, when it was the Ubykhs who attempted to unite the highlanders of the Western Caucasus in defence of their independence. The work has the further merit of introducing into scholarly circulation a large body of previously unpublished documents. As Fadeev himself writes, these were only part of the archival materials on the history of Abkhazia that had been identified, which were to have been published in dedicated collections. The intention was never carried out, and the fate of those materials remains unclear.

In 1937 the work of the Swiss traveller Frédéric DuBois de Montpéreux, *Voyage Around the Caucasus*[16], a publication of great scholarly value, was issued in Sukhum, with Fadeev responsible for its scholarly preparation. The mass repressions and persecutions then beginning did not spare Abkhazian scholarship. Many of Abkhazia's scholars were repressed, among them A. Khashba, V. Kukba, S. Chanba, S. Ashkhatsava and S. Basaria. Fadeev himself came under attack and harassment as a "Lakoba henchman" and was forced to leave Abkhazia. He subsequently worked at the state universities of Odessa and Moscow, yet Abkhazia remained within the sphere of his scholarly interests. In 1939 his article "Abkhazia in the First Quarter of the Nineteenth Century (Towards the History of Abkhazia's Annexation to Russia)"[17] appeared in the proceedings of Odessa State University. Curiously, although Fadeev had in his time supported the "Bagirov theory", his works of the 1930s were

subjected to harsh criticism: "Great harm has been done to the cause of the correct study of the history of Abkhazia by the works of A. V. Fadeev. Ignorance of the concrete material, rotten socialism, total falsification of historical reality: these are the marks of his writings. Abkhazia in the past he invariably treated as an autonomous and independent state which at best maintained merely good-neighbourly relations with Georgia. Fadeev held forth on the peculiar paths of Abkhazia's historical development, on 'Abkhazian feudalism', and in general on phenomena which in reality never existed."[18] Abkhazia also occupies a considerable place in the major works he wrote in Moscow in the 1950s on the complex and pressing problems of Russo-Caucasian relations in the nineteenth century.[19]

The first half of the 1930s saw the beginning of A. A. Olonetsky's active scholarly career. His principal works concern above all the economic history of Abkhazia in the second half of the nineteenth and the early twentieth century. Chief among them is a slim but very valuable book, *Essays on the Development of Capitalist Relations in Abkhazia*.[20] It examines the creation of the Abkhazian colonial market and the formation in Abkhazia of a raw-materials base for Russian industry, the development of capitalism in agriculture and other aspects of the economic history of Abkhazia in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Abkhazia, the author argued, suffered under the autocracy not only national but also economic oppression.

Economic development in Abkhazia proceeded exceedingly slowly. Russia herself was not among the most advanced of countries, and in the national borderlands, above all the Caucasus and Central Asia, economic development moved slower still; the Russian bourgeoisie cared about them only as a market for goods and a source of raw materials. Olonetsky brings forward a wealth of statistics and documents confirming the predatory exploitation of Abkhazia's natural resources. The development of capitalism, he also shows, was held back not only by objective causes but by a whole series of subjective factors: the government's unwillingness to see industrial production develop in Abkhazia, the absence of transport routes, an insufficient market of free hands and so on.

Olonetsky gives much attention to agriculture. Drawing on documents, he showed that Abkhazian agriculture could not withstand competition, and its produce was therefore scarcely exported at all. The exceptions were tobacco growing and, at a certain moment, maize, which for a time was carried out of Abkhazia in large quantities. Tobacco growing receives his closest scrutiny. He rightly observes that it was the main article of export from Abkhazia, and charts the growth in the number of plantations and in the quantity of tobacco produced and exported. He rightly stresses too that Abkhazia remained no more than a source of raw material: no tobacco industry developed in Abkhazia itself.

Two further articles by Olonetsky on the economic situation in Abkhazia in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries appeared at the same time in the proceedings of AbNIIK.[21]

In the article on the economic policy of the Mensheviks it was argued that under Menshevik rule the economy of Abkhazia fell into complete decay. Virtually the whole economic activity of the Mensheviks in Abkhazia amounted to the plunder of the population and the export of tobacco. During the years of the Menshevik occupation, the article records, the number of tobacco plantations and the volume of output shrank, which in the end very nearly destroyed

tobacco growing in Abkhazia altogether. The article also observed that the Mensheviks never carried through any serious agrarian transformation, retaining partial private ownership of land.

Among Olonetsky's other most visible works of the pre-war period is the article "The Orthodox Church as an Instrument of the Colonial Policy of Tsarism in Abkhazia".[22] It presents a good many archival documents on the church's activity at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, and publishes documents on its educational work, including the creation of parish schools. Entirely in the spirit of the militant atheism then dominant, the author lays his main stress on the church's negative role in the economic, political and social life of Abkhazia.

Shortly before the Great Patriotic War the first articles appeared by the well-known Georgian historian I. G. Antelava, who worked for many years in Sukhum. Among them stands out "Episodes from the History of Georgia's Struggle against the Aggression of Sultanic Turkey in the Sixteenth to Eighteenth Centuries".[23] Without a shadow of doubt the author includes Abkhazia within the system of western Georgian political formations (the kingdom of Imereti, Guria and Mingrelia). Here, entirely in the spirit of the conception then gathering strength of annexation to Russia as the lesser evil for the peoples of the Caucasus, it is argued that annexation to Russia was the alternative to the physical extermination of the peoples of Georgia by the Iran of the shahs and the Turkey of the sultans. Abkhazia receives considerable space in the article. As far as our period is concerned, it touches on the very beginning of the nineteenth century, examining in detail the activity of Kelesh-bey, which the author rates very highly.

In 1939 the outstanding Abkhaz historian G. A. Dzidzaria (1914–1988) began work at the Abkhazian Research Institute of Language, Literature and History (AbNII). While still a student at the Moscow Institute of Philosophy, Literature and History (MIFLI) he had attracted the attention of its leading teachers. Of great interest was his diploma thesis, "The Conquest of Abkhazia by Tsarist Russia", written under the supervision of the well-known Caucasus scholar Professor G. A. Kokiev.[24]

The thesis contained rich factual material and a series of important generalisations, which later allowed it to be included in the third volume of the scholar's collected works. In his review of it G. A. Kokiev wrote: "The ability to work with primary sources and with the literature, the ability to generalise scholarly material and, finally, a deep interest in research give grounds for recommending G. Dzidzaria as a candidate for postgraduate study in the history of the peoples of the USSR." So the future eminent scholar took his first steps in scholarship.[25]

In 1940 Dzidzaria's first independent work appeared, *The Struggle for Abkhazia in the First Decade of the Nineteenth Century*.[26] It contains rich factual material on the contest of the leading powers of the day (Russia, Turkey, France and England) for mastery in the Caucasus, and in Abkhazia in particular, at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Considerable and on the whole favourable attention is given to the activity of the ruler of Abkhazia, Kelesh-bey Chachba-Shervashidze. While remaining within sultanic Turkey carried the threat of physical

destruction for Abkhazia, the author observes, entry into Russia was likewise attended by processes that brought great calamities upon the Abkhaz people.

In the second half of the 1930s, as a result of the Stalin-Beria repressions, Abkhazian scholarship suffered heavy losses and was severely undermined. The humanities bore the brunt, since the Georgian leadership was working unceremoniously to belittle the history and culture of the Abkhaz people and to present them as subordinate to a "more highly developed Georgian culture". Even the arrival at AbNII, in the late 1930s and early 1940s, of many outstanding Abkhaz scholars, among them G. A. Dzidzaria, Kh. S. Bgazhba, K. S. Shakryl and Sh. D. Inal-Ipa, did not for a long time improve the situation.

The outbreak of the Great Patriotic War of 1941 to 1945 raised one more serious obstacle to the development of the humanities, and of history in particular.

Throughout the war years scarcely a single work on the history of the region was written.

After the war the scholarly life of Abkhazia grew more intensive. New works appeared, including on the history of Abkhazia. In 1946 Dzidzaria defended his candidate's dissertation in historical sciences, "Abkhazia in 1917-1918". The work of Abkhazia's historians in this period nonetheless laboured under serious difficulties, arising chiefly from the political course of the Georgian leadership, which aimed at the gradual assimilation of Abkhazia by Georgia. Dzidzaria's article "The Abkhaz-Ubykh Alliance in the Liberation Struggle in the Western Caucasus in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century"[27], written as early as 1945 to 1947, went unpublished, and came out only relatively recently.

The most likely reason it failed to appear, beyond the attitude already described within historical scholarship towards the national liberation movement of the Caucasian highlanders, lies in the treatment of Dzidzaria himself. From precisely 1947 he was one of the authors, together with B. V. Shinkuba and K. S. Shakryl, of the well-known letter to the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) on the distortions of Leninist nationalities policy in Abkhazia, after which the scholar endured years of vilification, pressure and persecution at the hands of the authorities.

A conspicuous event in the scholarly life of Abkhazia was the appearance of the first volume of the proceedings of the Abkhazian State Museum[28], which included a whole series of articles on the period that concerns us, among them contributions by A. A. Olonetsky, A. G. Melikhov and G. A. Dzidzaria.[29]

In 1949 the Trudy of AbNII carried Dzidzaria's article on the life and work of the first Abkhaz ethnographer, Solomon Teimurkovich Zvanba, the first in a whole series of studies of this outstanding representative of the Abkhaz intelligentsia of the first half of the nineteenth century.[30]

In 1949 there also appeared I. G. Antelava's book *Essays on the History of Abkhazia in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*[31], which gives a very high assessment of the activity of Kelesh-bey Chachba in suppressing the separatism of the Abkhaz feudal lords and resisting Turkey.

In that same year, 1949, a new offensive opened against the history of Abkhazia and against the ethnic distinctiveness of the Abkhaz people as such. It began with the appearance of the notorious article by the Georgian literary scholar P. I. Ingorokva, "Giorgi Merchule, a Georgian Writer of the Tenth Century".[32]

In this work Ingorokva sought to prove that the present-day Abkhaz appeared on the territory of Abkhazia only in the seventeenth century, having migrated from beyond the mountains, and that the Abkhaz mentioned in the medieval chronicles, the creators of the Abkhazian kingdom among them, were Georgian tribes. This false theory was later subjected to thorough criticism by Abkhaz scholars and by some Georgian scholars alike, yet from time to time it resurfaces; in present-day Georgia it is once again highly popular. In the late 1940s, admittedly, the Ingorokva theory was not adopted in its pure form. At the prompting of the party leadership the prevailing doctrine became that the Abkhaz were an ethnographic group of Georgians, like the Svans, the Mingrelians and so on. A revision of the entire history of Abkhazia followed. The phrase "the Abkhaz people" all but vanished from circulation, the people being denied a history of their own, and the history of Abkhazia came to be treated as part of the history of Georgia.

The party leadership of Abkhazia watched zealously over the execution of this directive. Well known is the reply of A. I. Mgeladze, then first secretary of the Abkhazian Regional Committee (obkom) of the Communist Party of Georgia, to an enquiry sent by the Institute of Linguistics of the USSR Academy of Sciences to the Abkhazian Research Institute concerning the number of Abkhazian speakers among the population of Abkhazia: "No such language as Abkhazian exists. The Abkhaz speak a corrupted Georgian, and energetic measures are now being taken to correct it."[33] In the same spirit the historians of Abkhazia were expected to write, under the most brutal pressure from the republic's party leadership. The temper of the age is caught in a letter written in that same year, 1949, by the well-known historian A. A. Olonetsky to A. I. Mgeladze, first secretary of the Abkhazian obkom of the Communist Party (Bolsheviks).[34] In it the author repents of the errors committed in his earlier published works. Among the gravest he counts his belief, held captive as he was to the false, anti-historical, un-Marxist proposition of the absolute evil of annexation to Russia, that Russian influence in the first period of Abkhazia's annexation led only to the destruction of the economic ties that Russia had received from Georgia. The economic legacy of Turkey, Olonetsky asserts in the letter, consisted in nothing but popular ruin and the barbarous destruction of the cultural and economic assets that had arisen in Abkhazia earlier, in the age when the Georgian feudal kingdom flourished. He accused Turkey too of fostering the slave trade, and admits to similar errors in his other works, committed in thrall to the same theory of the absolute evil of "annexation to Russia".

Among the most serious errors that he and the other members of the history department of AbNII had gone on committing until the very latest time, Olonetsky names his habit of writing and saying "the Abkhaz people", quite wrongly opposing the part to the whole, that is, failing to take account of the Abkhaz being part of the Georgian nation. These and other errors, the author wrote, had been uncovered thanks to the vigilance of the party leadership of Abkhazia, and he would spare no effort to master the newest methodological directives handed down from above.

No less valuable testimony to what was happening in the late 1940s and early 1950s comes from G. A. Dzidzaria. In his speeches and letters he records the vilification to which the historical scholarship of Abkhazia, and he personally, were subjected in this period. Many of his works and addresses, he notes, drew sharp criticism from the first secretary of the Abkhazian obkom, A. I. Mgeladze, and his minions, Getia, Tuskadze, Tsulukidze and others. Abkhazian historical scholarship, Dzidzaria observes, found itself in these years in a desperate position: the history of Abkhazia went virtually unstudied, and scholarly works on it ceased to appear even in the Trudy of the Abkhazian institute.

Fadeev too came under sharp attack. Although he had in his time supported the "Bagirov theory", his works of the 1930s were mercilessly demolished: "Great harm has been done to the cause of the correct study of the history of Abkhazia by the works of A. V. Fadeev. Ignorance of the concrete material, rotten socialism, total falsification of historical reality: these are the marks of his writings. Abkhazia in the past he invariably treated as an autonomous and independent state which at best maintained merely good-neighbourly relations with Georgia. Fadeev held forth on the peculiar paths of Abkhazia's historical development, on 'Abkhazian feudalism', and in general on phenomena which in reality never existed."[35]

Many works written in the 1940s and early 1950s never saw the light of day; only mentions of them survive. Dzidzaria's study of Kelesh-bey went unpublished after the sharp criticism levelled at the scholar by Tsulukidze, director of the Sukhum Pedagogical Institute, at the eighth Sukhum city party conference.[36] The further fate of the monograph *Kelesh-bey*, then being prepared for the press, is unknown.

From the beginning of the 1950s Kelesh-bey altogether became one of the most criticised and persecuted figures of Abkhazian history. Characteristic is the author's preface to the second edition of the *Essays on the History of Abkhazia in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*.[37] Its author, I. G. Antelava, writes that the first edition of the work, published in 1949, contained a whole series of errors. One of the most conspicuous was the praise lavished on the activity of Kelesh-bey, whereas according to the newest findings Kelesh-bey was a reactionary figure who had played a negative part in history. His principal fault lay in having fought for the independence of Abkhazia, that is, in the historical conception of the late 1940s and early 1950s, in having opposed the unifying process most progressive for Georgia. Separatism, incidentally, was also the charge laid against a number of celebrated figures of Georgian history, the Mingrelian ruler Levan II Dadiani for one, who was likewise declared a reactionary. Besides pointing to his own "errors", Antelava writes that similar "erroneous views" were held by other scholars and cultural figures of Abkhazia, among them G. A. Dzidzaria and G. D. Gulia.[38]

The late 1940s and early 1950s in general stand among the darkest periods in the history of Abkhazia, when an official policy of assimilating the Abkhaz was in force and the very terms "the Abkhaz people", "the history of Abkhazia" and the like disappeared from use.

Summing up the Abkhazian historiography of the 1930s to the early 1950s, several stages in the development of historical scholarship can be distinguished.

From the beginning of the 1930s Marxist methodology became dominant in the historical scholarship of Abkhazia, as of the whole Soviet Union. In the early 1930s the historians of Abkhazia (A. V. Fadeev, A. A. Olonetsky and others) worked within the framework of the so-called Pokrovsky school, interpreting the history of Abkhazia from the standpoint of the "absolute evil" of annexation to Russia. For all its class intolerance and narrowness, this made it possible to publish a body of most valuable material showing the negative consequences that annexation to Russia carried for Abkhazia.

From the second half of the 1930s the official conception of history in the Soviet Union shifted once more. The view prevailed that annexation to Russia had been the lesser evil for the peoples of the Caucasus, set against the alternative of remaining within reactionary and backward Turkey and Iran. Chronologically this coincided with the Stalinist repressions at their greatest extent, and the damage done to Abkhazia in this period proved especially grievous. Not only were virtually the entire Abkhaz political leadership and intelligentsia destroyed, together with a considerable part of the population at large; the very existence of the Abkhaz people was called into question. L. P. Beria and his minions proposed the deportation of the Abkhaz to Kazakhstan and Central Asia. The question was raised again more than once, and although in the end it was decided to leave the Abkhaz in place, they were to be made part of the Georgian people. Towards this end practical steps were taken (the mass resettlement in Abkhazia of a large part of the population of western Georgia, the transfer of the Abkhaz alphabet onto a Georgian graphic basis, the conversion of Abkhaz schools to Georgian as the language of instruction, and the recasting of Abkhazia's place names in a Georgian mould) alongside theoretical ones: at the prompting of the party authorities astonishing "discoveries" were made, that the Abkhaz were an ethnographic group of Georgians and the Abkhaz language a "corrupted Georgian". Only the death of Stalin, the arrest of Beria and the condemnation of the "cult of personality" enabled the Abkhaz to recover their ethnic identity and their own distinctive history.

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