



History in the Context of the Georgian-Abkhazian Conflict*

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Abstract

The 2014 disturbances in the Ukraine occasioned renewed discussion of the 2008 Russo-Georgian War. As the situation continued to worsen in eastern Ukraine, US President Obama announced on a visit to Poland at the start of June that the US and NATO would strengthen ties even with the non-NATO-member-states of the Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia. This last has aspirations of membership, even though it does not control the republics of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, which most of the world nevertheless regards as integral parts of Georgia. As long as the Georgian-Abkhazian dispute remains unresolved, there will be problems regarding inter-state relations with/for western Transcaucasia. And there can be no resolution of the Abkhazian issue without a proper understanding of Abkhazia's history (both ancient and more recent); it was to try to ensure that the debate is not based on misconceptions, unsubstantiated assertions or even plain errors that this article was written. It is grounded on a consideration of a range of materials (from Agathias' Greek text through relevant discussions in Georgian, Russian and English). The toppling of Abkhazia's democratically elected president (Aleksandr Ankvab) at the end of May 2014 makes the question of Abkhazia even more topical.

Keywords

Abkhazia, Georgia, Georgian-Abkhazian Dispute, Caucasian History

Events during the spring of 2014 in the Ukraine (in particular Russia's reacquisition of the Crimea) reawakened Western memories of the short Russo-Georgian war of August 2008. At its inception, a flurry of Western leaders rushed to Tbilisi to demonstrate their solidarity with Georgian president Mikhail (Misha) Saak'ashvili in the face of Russian 'aggression' against Georgia's 'territorial integrity'. One of the first out of the starting-

* This article is partly based on the analysis of *Edge of Empires. A History of Georgia* by Donald Rayfield ("Reaktion Books", 2012).

stalls (certainly the first from the UK) was the then-leader of the Conservative opposition, David Cameron. Also prominent among those eager to add his bluster to the lambasting of the Kremlin was Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, NATO's Secretary General at the time. The residents of South Ossetia, along with those in Abkhazia, where a Georgian assault had been feared in the spring of 2008, were not deceived and knew full well that hostilities were ignited by Saak'ashvili's attack on the S. Ossetian capital, Tskhinval, late on Thursday 7 August, which resulted in a predictable and swift response from Moscow. That this was the actual sequence of events was subsequently established by the investigation conducted by an EU Commission under Heidi Tagliavini, a conclusion which did little, if anything, to weaken EU/Western support for Georgia.

It was, then, the very aggressor who had won the backing of the West. More than that, the very decision unwisely taken at NATO's meeting in April 2008 in Bucharest, unsurprisingly at the prompting of US President George W. Bush and such former Warsaw Pact members as Poland, to produce at their next meeting at the end of the year a Membership Action Plan (MAP) for both Georgia and the Ukraine, must surely be seen as one of the ultimate causes for the 2008-war in Georgia, not to mention the 2014-chaos in the Ukraine, where membership of both the EU and NATO is back on the agenda. Jaap de Hoop Scheffer's successor as NATO's Secretary General, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, has since his appointment seen fit to comment in highly unflattering terms on such matters as the various democratic elections in Abkhazia, where he and his organisation have absolutely no standing. Deepening NATO involvement in Georgia is mooted in the light of the Ukraine's *Maidan*-rebellion, and Western politicians are happy to parrot the nonsensical Georgian orthodoxy that a fifth of their country is under Russian 'occupation' (*vid.* former UK Defence Minister Liam Fox's article in *The Mail on Sunday*, 23 March 2014), even though neither Abkhazia nor S. Ossetia have (for the most part) been under Georgian jurisdiction since the early 1990s; any remaining territorial links (e.g. Abkhazia's Upper K'odor Valley) to Tbilisi were severed in the wake of the 2008-war, at which time Russia formally recognised both republics. During his visit to Tbilisi on 8 May 2014, British Foreign Secretary evidently went so far as to promise 'very clear support' for Georgia's bid to join NATO.

As Georgian-Abkhazian relations began to deteriorate (late 1988-early 1989), spiralled down into the first fatal ethnic clashes (July 1989), and continued to descend into all-out war (14 August 1992 – 30 September 1993), linguists and historians locked horns in a bitter debate over the history (general and/or linguistic) of Abkhazia and the Abkhazians. There has been no political solution to the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict, even though over two decades have passed since Shevardnadze's Georgian forces were compelled to abandon their attempt to deny the Abkhazians by force of arms their right to self-determination. As a result, both Abkhazia and Georgia have suffered enormously (Abkhazia still struggling to construct a post-Soviet state and to strengthen its democratic institutions with only limited financial support from Russia alone), and so resolution of this problem remains crucial for the future well-being not only of Abkhazia(ns) and Georgia(ns) but also of Transcaucasia(ns) as a whole. Accepting this, and given the extreme sensitivities surrounding the history of Abkhazia, it is incumbent on any commentator not only to tread carefully but also to go to extremes to ensure that what (s)he presents to readers/listeners is as factually accurate as the said commentator can personally guarantee; if the commentator is not capable of guaranteeing accuracy where an issue is a matter of debate, then it behoves that commentator to offer his/her audience all relevant data so that interested parties can draw their own conclusions based on the evidence proffered.

In 2012, Donald Rayfield published his history of Georgia (referenced below as DR), in which (*qua* historian) he signally failed to meet these standards in respect of his treatment of certain aspects of Abkhazia's history (and politics). I was able to do little more than touch on the relevant areas in my review for *Central Asian Survey* (forthcoming), the word-limit imposed on reviewers preventing the full treatment that the topics deserved. The current article, therefore, attempts to make good that deficiency.

For those unfamiliar with Georgia, a few points by way of backgrounding are in order. The language-family to which Georgian belongs is known as the South Caucasian, or Kartvelian (from the word the Georgians use to designate themselves, namely *kartveli*), family. It has four members: Georgian, Mingrelian, Laz and Svan; only between Mingrelian and Laz is there any degree of mutual intelligibility. The members of the

family cannot be demonstrated to be related to any other language(s) spoken today or in the past. The four Kartvelian peoples live (essentially) either in Georgia or across the border in north-eastern Turkey, the homeland of virtually all the Laz—Georgian speakers of the Ingilo dialect are to be found in Azerbaijan, whilst the descendants of an east-Georgian community transplanted in the 17th century by Shah Abbas maintain their dialect around Fereydan (Iran); Georgians in Turkey (from the historical Georgian-speaking provinces of T'ao, K'lardzheti and Shavsheti) speak the Imerkhebian dialect. Within Georgia, the historical dividing-line between Georgian and Mingrelian was the R. Tskhenis-ts'q'ali, with Mingrelian spoken to the west, Georgian to the east, though Georgian began to increase its domain westwards from the 19th century, whilst Mingrelian itself began to extend north-westwards across the R. Ingur at the expense of Abkhaz; Svan, with the smallest number of speakers, developed in the mountain-fastnesses of north-west Georgia in the valleys in the upper reaches of the rivers Tskhenis-ts'q'ali (Lower Svanetia) and Ingur (Upper Svanetia)—it is said that Svans moved into Abkhazia's Upper K'odor Valley when most of the Abkhazian population abandoned Abkhazia for exile in the Ottoman Empire after the end of the Great Caucasian War (1864) against Russia and the Russo-Turkish War (1877-78). Following the introduction of universal education during the Soviet period, Georgian was learned by all Kartvelians educated in Georgia, as none of the three sister-languages were taught in schools, and, since c.1930, all Kartvelians in Georgia (plus the Nakh-speaking Bats people in the east Georgian village of Zemo Alvani, Nakh being the North Central Caucasian family to which Chechen and Ingush belong) have been regarded (and, indeed, officially designated) as 'Georgians'; recent attempts to persuade the Laz in Turkey to fall into line by accepting a parallel self-designation as 'Georgians' has met with (understandable) resistance by members of the Laz intelligentsia. Abkhazians do not regard Mingrelians as Georgians, and the fact that Mingrelians resident in Abkhazia (especially in the Gal District, bordering Georgia's province of Mingrelia) seem to prefer to regard themselves as 'Georgians' does not help with their integration into Abkhazian society, since, by adopting this stance, they are openly identifying themselves with 'the enemy' in the context of the still-unresolved Georgian-Abkhazian conflict.

As for Abkhaz(ians), the language belongs to the small North West Caucasian family, whose other members are the various Circasian (Cherkess(ian)) dialects and the now extinct Ubykh. The historical boundary between Abkhaz and Ubykh was the R. Mdzymta, to the north of Abkhazia's current border with Russia along the R. Psou. The Ubykhs lived around and inland from today's city of Sochi. To their north and along the foothills of the North Caucasus from the basin of the R. Kuban up to the (North) Ossetians in the centre of the North Caucasus lived the speakers of the various Circassian dialects; the most divergent of the Abkhaz dialects is located in the North Caucasian republic of Karachay-Cherkessia, where along the Teberda valley the ancestors of today's speakers settled in the 14th century. ALL the Ubykhs and most of both the Circassians and Abkhazians migrated to the Ottoman Empire after the end of the Great Caucasian War between 1864 and 1877-78.

If such is the linguistic-geographical situation today and/or in relatively recent historical times, was it always thus?

Whilst one might allow the possibility that Svaneti(a) 'two or three thousand years ago was more extensive than today's landlocked highlands' (DR p. 13), one has to question the justification for asserting that it 'then reached the coast' (*ibid.*), or, more specifically, that: 'a Svan king ... may have controlled Dioscurias [one ancient name for the Abkhazian capital—GH] for a century before A.D. 50' (DR p. 28), neither opinion, surprisingly and unacceptably, being sourced to any ancient testimony. The troublesome fact is that the Svans as such are not mentioned in any surviving source until Strabo (64/63 B.C – c. 24 A.D.), who in Book XI (2.19) writes of his contemporary *Soánes* thus: 'Among the tribes which come together at Dioscurias are the *Phtheirophagi* (Lice-eaters), who have received their name from their squalor and their filthiness. Near them are the *Soanes*, who are no less filthy, but superior to them in power,—indeed, one might almost say that they are foremost in courage and power. At any rate, they are masters of the peoples around, and hold possession of the heights of the Caucasus above Dioscurias' (H. L. Jones' translation for Loeb); Strabo had already briefly referred to 'the *Soanes*, and other small tribes that live in the neighbourhood of the Caucasus' (XI.2.14). The locality assigned to the *Soánes* nicely accords with the Svans' modern territory and is not at variance with what the 11th-century Georgian chroni-

cler Leont'i Mroveli wrote of the 'country between the Egris-ts'q'ali [R. In-gur = Egru in Abkhaz, this being Abkhazia's border with Georgia—GH] and the Rioni, from the sea to the mountain(s), in which lies Egrisi [Mingrelia—GH] and Svaneti' (S. Q'aukhchishvili's 1955 edition of the Georgian chronicles *Kartlis Tskhovreba* I: 24).

The question to be asked, then, is: what peoples or tribes do earlier commentators name as residing along the relevant stretch of the Black Sea's eastern littoral or, if one prefers, in and around the north of Colchis, a territory, which the Abkhazia-born Mingrelian scholar Simon Dzhana-shia appositely described as 'more a geographical than a political term, and even then with uncertain boundaries' (see his 'The historical geography of the Black Sea coast', probably written in the 1930s but only published posthumously in the 1988 volume VI of Dzhana-shia's collected works, pp. 250-322, in Georgian), though Strabo deemed it to extend from Pitsunda (the most magnificent of Abkhazia's resorts) in the north to Trebizond/Trabzon? Based on the little evidence available (e.g. fragments from Hekataeus of Miletus, c. 550 - c. 476 B.C. and his rough contemporary Skylax of Karyanda, or of Artemidorus of Ephesus, fl. c. 100 B.C., etc.), the Georgian historian Giorgi Melikishvili drew a map of tribal distribution and inserted it opposite p. 400 of his article on Colchis in the 6-4th centuries B.C. (volume 1 of *Essays on Georgian History*, 1970, in Georgian): Colchians themselves are shown occupying the coast of west Georgia (from today's border with Turkey upto some distance beyond the R. In-gur); to their north-west, from the R. K'odor to north of Pitsunda, reside the 'Heniokhoi'; north-westwards from today's Soch'i we find the 'Kerketai'; and finally from today's Tuapse there were the 'Achaeanes'—Strabo (XI.2.14) mentions sources suggesting a slightly different ordering and with one additional tribe, namely (this time listing them from the north in a southerly direction): Achaeanes, Zyg(o)i, Heniokhoi, and then the Kerketai.

Unsurprisingly, the identity behind these Greek terms has been much discussed. The 'Kerketai' have been judged to be the Circassians, though the Dutch Circassian scholar, Aert Kuipers, in his 1960 monograph *Phoneme and Morpheme in Kabardian* questioned such a linkage. In the early Greek literary period (as, for instance, the Homeric poems) the ethnonym *Axaioi* was used to refer to (a tribe of) the Greeks themselves, much like *Hélle:nes*, which later became the Greeks' universal self-designation 'Hel-

lenes'. And so, one wonders how, in the Caucasian context of the mid- to late 1st millennium B.C., it might have come to be applied to an indigenous people. In fact, the 4th-century Roman historian Ammianus Marcellinus (325/330–after 391 A.D.) even suggested that this people were descendants of Greek warriors from the time of the Trojan War blown off course into the Pontic Euxine (quoted from *Die Päkhy-Sprache* by Julius von Mészáros, 1934: 10). As for the *He:nióxoí*, this was another purely Greek lexeme meaning 'rein-holders, charioteers' (or, in connection with ships, 'helmsmen') and might thus have been selected to refer to a local people/ assemblage of tribes famed in the area for their prowess at horsemanship (or seafaring, or both)—in Greek mythology, Castor and Pollux (Polydeuces), twin-sons of Zeus and known as the Dioscour(o)i (recall the ancient name of the Abkhazian capital!), were two of the Argonauts who voyaged with Jason to Colchis, Castor being famed for horsemanship, Pollux for sailing, the two being together the patron-gods of sailors (cf. *infra*).

As for the Greek *Zygoí*, is it legitimate to link them with the Abkhazian term /á.zaχ^w(a)/, now little-used for 'Circassian, Cherkess' (the more usual ethnonym in Abkhaz being /[a.]adəga/ (stress on the 2nd syllable), which latter is based on the Circassians' own self-designation /a:dəɣa/)? Bagrat Dzhnanashia in his 1954 Abkhaz-Georgian dictionary gives the Georgian equivalent as /dzhik.i/, but the 8-volume Georgian Academy dictionary does not recognise such a meaning, ascribing to the term the main sense of 'leopard'. On the other hand, the dictionaries of Sulkhan Saba Orbeliani (1658-1725) and Davit Chubinashvili (1887) did know the word as the name of 'a tribe living alongside the Abkhazians', whilst Rayfield's own two-volume Georgian-English lexicon (2006) is slightly less specific in offering the definition 'ancient Black Sea ethnos'. Dzhnanashia (like the 2-volume Abkhaz-Abkhaz-Russian dictionary of 1986) also quotes the interesting colloquial phrase /á.zaχ^wa.pəsa/, which he renders into Georgian as /dzhik.et.is kar.i/ 'wind of Dzhiketi(a)' or /da.sa.vl.et.is kar.i/ 'wind of the west'. We shall return to the 'Dzhiks/Dzhigets' below.

Volume 11 of the Soviet Georgian encyclopaedia reveals how speculation as to what local identity might lie behind the term *He:nióxoí* has produced a variety of suggestions, namely: Laz/Ch'an-Mingrelians, Svans, or Abkhazians. Proof at this remove is simply impossible, but of the three suggestions, the second must be deemed the least convincing, given the

nature of the overall evidence. But is Rayfield's conviction supported by classical authors later than Strabo?

For the first century A.D., Pliny Secundus (the Elder, 23-79 A.D.) mentions a *Gens Absilae*, whilst a century later Arrian (c. 86-160 A.D.) speaks of the *Apsílai* 'Apsilians' as (northern) neighbours to the Laz (Greek *Lazoí*), whilst above the Apsilians come the *Abaskoí* (aka *Abasgoí*), and then the *San(n)ígai* ('where Sebastopolis is situated'), who are separated from the *Zilkhoí* by the R. Akhaious (identified with today's Shakhe near Sochi); thereafter reside the still mysterious Achaeans. To complete Arrian's sequence of coastal tribes along to the Trapezuntines, he lists as Colchian tribes from the Laz south(-west)wards: the Zydrites, the Heniokhs, the Makrones (most plausibly the Mingrelians, named in Georgian /me.gr.el.eb.i/ and in Mingrelian itself /ma.rg.al.ep.i/), a people whom Xenophon styled the Drils but whom Arrian took to be the Sans (Greek *Sánnoi*), though Strabo had already stated that the Sans were earlier called the Makrones (XII.3.18). Procopius of Caesarea (c. 500 – c. 565 A.D.) in his history of the Gothic War speaks of the Trapezuntines having been described as having as neighbours either the Sans (*Sánoi*) 'who are now called Tzans (*Tzánoi*)' (VIII.1) or the Colchians 'otherwise known as the Laz' (*ibid.*). Procopius also introduces as neighbours to the Abazgians a people he calls the *Broúxoi*, which has plausibly been taken to be the first clear appearance in history of the Ubykhs, who call themselves *T^waxə*, where the labialised dental represents a trilled dento-bilabial coarticulation [tp]. Reference to the Heniokhs in the vicinity of Trebizond is deemed by those who see in the term a reference to the Laz/Ch'an-Mingrelians as confirmation of their view, reflecting the Laz-Mingrelian (or Zan) dialect-continuum that ran around the coast from Mingrelia into today's north-eastern Turkey prior to being split into Mingrelians (to the north) and Laz = Ch'ans (to the south) by westward-moving Georgians in historical times.

The Abkhazians call themselves *Apswa* (plural *Apswaa*), and there can be no equivocation about identifying them with the classical Ab/psilians, then located around today's Ochamchira (classical Gyenos) according to Arrian. As for the Abazas/Abazinians, at first glance, it would look to be perverse to doubt the equation of this group with the ancient Abazgians. But the modern-day self-designation *Abáza* is a borrowing from Kabardian *A:bá:za*, a collective Circassian ethnonym (cf. West Circassian *A:bá:-*

dza) for all Abkhazians (as pointed out by A. N. Genko in his 1955 *Abaza Language*, in Russian). And so, one must conclude that by the term *Abask/goi* the ancient writers will have been referring to some north (-eastern) group of Abkhaz speakers—interestingly, when the Englishman James Stanislaus Bell referred in his 1840 2-volume work *Journal of a Residence in Circassia during the years 1837, 1838 and 1839* to the Abkhazians, he called them ‘Azras’, /*азра*/ being the Ubykh designation for an Abkhazian, and, for Bell, the term *Abaza* meant ‘Ubykh’.¹

Presumably, the *Zilkhoi* are the same people earlier named *Zygoi*. But who are the *San(n)igs*? Again without any argumentation, Rayfield unequivocally equates them with the Svans (p. 33), but were they?

Early in the 3rd century, Hippolytus (170-235 A.D.) spoke of the ‘so-called’ *Sannigs* being identical with the Sans, but this is an aberration, for the two were regularly kept distinct (Stephanus of Byzantium in the 6th century was still clearly distinguishing between them), the *Sannigai* being located further north (as neighbours to the Abazgians) than the Sans. The default opinion in Georgia is that the *Sannigai* (like most/?all these ancient coastal dwellers) were a ‘Georgian’, *recte* Kartvelian, people, but, according to the Soviet Georgian encyclopaedia, the Mingrelian expert on Laz, Simon Dzhikia, suggested that they should be equated with the Abkhazian Sadz tribe. Specifically, one can point to the local family-name *Tsan.ba*, the plural of which today is *Tsan.a.*, the long *-a* suffix deriving from **sa*, where the reverse question-mark represents the voiced pharyngeal fricative, which could easily have motivated its rendition into Greek by gamma (the same element explaining the velar plosive in *Abask/goi* above, as has been proposed by Chirikba). The initial affricate (*ts-*) would naturally have been represented by sigma, only the fricative component of an initial affricate being readily perceived/articulated by speakers of languages (such as Ancient Greek) that lack such initial affricates.² This I

¹ See ‘Survey of the Abkhazians and Abazas in Turkey’ by V. A. Chirikba, whom I take this opportunity to thank for providing several observations and references included in this paper, published in *Dzhiget Collection: Questions on the Ethno-Cultural History of Western Abkhazia or Dzhigetija*, 2012, in Russian, pp. 21-95, also at: <www.academia.edu/570412/Survey_on_the_Abkhazians_and_Abazas_in_Turkey_>.

² For the full argument, including the pertinent observation that the toponym ‘Tsan-drypsh’ lies in the heart of the said territory, see Z. V. Anchabadze *History and Culture of*

personally find to be the most convincing equation, for, although, if Arrian is correct in placing Sebastopolis in their territory, their range must simply be assumed to have extended further south than that later occupied by the Sadz tribe, the fact that the Sannigai were consistently located on the coast to the north of the Apsil-Abazgians fits neatly with the range of the Sadz tribe prior to the late-19th-century mass-migration of the North West Caucasian peoples. The Sadzians (in Abkhaz /a.sádz.k^wa/), known in early 19th-century Russian sources as the Dzhiks/Dzhigets, were described as then residing along the stretch of coast from Pitsunda to Ubykhia (around Sochi), placing them to the north of the Bzyp Abkhazians. The memoirs of the Russian G. Filipson, writing in 1885, not only bear witness to this connection but also explain why, with Russia's 1864-victory in the Great Caucasian War, the Sadz felt compelled to abandon their homeland. He recalled: 'Between Gagra and Ubykh territory live the Dzhigets, a small people of the Abkhazian race...The Dzhigets were under the powerful influence of the Ubykhs and, willingly or not, had to participate in all actions until the fort of the Holy Spirit was built in 1837 by the mouth of the R. Mdzymta' (quoted from *Materials on the History of Abkhazia*, vol. I, 1803-39, in Russian, being a collection of archival materials gathered by Abkhazian academician Georgij Dzidzari(j)a and published in 2008). From a report of 1835 by two Russian officers included in the same collection (p. 184) an unambiguous qualification is applied to the Dzhigets, viz. '/asadzk^wa/, as they call themselves'. Interestingly, Stephanus of Byzantium in his 6th-century list of peoples included mention of the *Sázoí* as living along the Pontus, though the entry was immediately followed by that for the *Sannígai!*

The confusion of which tribe or clan belonged to which later larger ethnos was by no means confined to the ancients. In the 17th century, the illustrious Turkish traveller Evliya Çelebi, whose mother was Abkhazian, used the term 'Abaza language' for his examples of standard Abkhaz, whilst he used the term 'Sadz-Abaza' for what was in fact Ubykh. And in a recent article ('On the ethnic nomenclature of the population of Sadzian

Ancient Abkhazia 1964; Sh. D. Inal-Ipa *The Sadzians*, 1995; and V. A. Chirikba 'On the Etymology of the Hydronyms Bzyp and Mdzymta' published in *Abkhazology: Works of ABIGI*, 3, 2009: 21-38, but also available at http://www.academia.edu/2356434/On_the_Etymology_of_the_Hydronyms_Bzyp_and_Mdzymta_ (all in Russian).

Abkhazia in the first half of the 19th century' in the aforementioned *Dzhi-get Collection*, pp. 6-11) Temur Achugba demonstrates continuing confusion over the assignment of ethnic identity to denizens of the region—recall what was said of J. S. Bell's mid-19th-century usage above. This, in turn, could account for uncertainty within Abkhaz itself over the precise meaning of /á.zaχ^w(a)/—a tribe living in, or to, the west of Abkhazian territory, which is where one historically found the small Ubykh and more numerous Circassian peoples, even if, in origin, it properly designated the purely Abkhazian Sadzian tribe, lost to Abkhazia after 1864. And so, Rayfield's unquestioning equation of the Sannigs with the Svans must, at the very least, be open to grave doubt. Is there any other opening for the Svans along the coast?

Simon Dzhanašia in his paper 'Tubal-Tabal, T'ibarene, Iberian' (pp. 1-74 in his *Collected Works III*, 1959, in Georgian) quotes a passage from Pliny the Elder's 'Natural History' (VI.14), where the territory between the R. Phasis (Rion) and Sebastopol is being described: 'Then another river Charistus, the Saltian tribe (*gens Saltiae*), whom older writers called the Lice-eaters, and other Sans (*Sanni*); the R. Khobi flowing from the Caucasus through the [territory of the] Svans (*per Suanos fluens*); then Rhoan, the region of Cegritice, the rivers Sigania, Tersi, Astelphus, Khrisoroas, the tribe of the Apsilians, the fortress Sebastopol' (p. 7). Is this the proof that, in Pliny's day, which is, of course, already later than the period of residence allotted to them by Rayfield, Svans occupied coastal territory where the R. Khobi flows, somewhere alongside the Sans? [N.B. the Sigania has been identified with the Ingur/Egry, the Astelphus with the K'odor/K^wy-dry, and the Khrisoroas with the Kelasur/K^lalash^wyr]. So unexpected was this possibility deemed that Dzhanašia assumed a corruption in the Latin text, postulating that instead of *per Suanos fluens* one should read *per Sannos fluens* 'flowing through (the territory of) the Sans', which restores some order to Pliny's otherwise aberrant account.

But there is one other source that needs to be included in the discussion. This is Ptolemy (90-c. 168 A.D.), who, in his *Geography* (fasc. V), speaks of *Akhaioí*, *Kerkétai*, *He-níokhoi* and *Souannóolkhoi*. This led Mingrelian ethnographer Sergi Mak'alatia to indicate on the map he drew on the basis of Ptolemy's data for the tribal distribution within Colchis and ranging up to the Sea of Azov in the 2nd century B.C. (viz. some two centu-

ries before the time that Ptolemy was actually writing) and which he set opposite p. 36 of his *History and Ethnography of Mingrelia* (1941, in Georgian) the so-called Svano-Colchians holding most of the territory of modern-day Abkhazia from the R. Hippius (which, according to its position on Mak'alatia's map, looks to be the K'odor/K^wydry rather than the Ingur/Egry) to the R. Corax (clearly occupying on Mak'alatia's map the place of the R. Bzyp). Might this, then, be the support needed for Rayfield's claim that Greek (or, rather, Graeco-Roman) geographers provide evidence for the Svans' coastal residence (p. 13)? Hardly, for so contrary to the weight of all the other evidence is Ptolemy's composite term that Dzhanashia persuasively argues that another scribal slip here could be masking the far more logical *Sannóolkhoi* 'San-Colchians'.

Now, since Pliny, as noted, alluded to Sans in both the north and south of the general area of Colchis, we should, for the sake of completion, examine what lies behind this ethnonym too. But firstly does Rayfield adduce any actual evidence in favour of viewing the Svans as a one-time maritime people? It is 'the fact that the Svan language still has idioms figuring masts and sails' (p. 13). Whilst it would be distinctly odd for the language of a maritime people not to possess marine vocabulary, it hardly follows from the presence of the same in the language of a people living away from the coast that they must once have been coastal dwellers. With specific reference to the Svans, they are likely to have travelled since time immemorial out of their mountain-fastness for purposes of trade—Strabo himself, after all, spoke of the Romans needing 130 interpreters to conduct trade in Dioscourias, and the famous Georgian silent film *marili svanetistvis* 'Salt for Svanetia' testifies to the necessity of passage to the lowland for the acquisition of this precious commodity—and so they could quite easily have become acquainted with the items in question. But what are the Svan words and idioms in question? Rayfield's readers are not told. But, the lexemes that Rayfield probably had in mind are *anz* (Lower Bal *ans*), cognate with Georgian *andza*, whose main modern meaning is 'mast', and *apr*, which is deemed to be a borrowing from Georgian *apra* 'sail' and, as such, earns no entry in the 2000 Svan-Georgian lexicon; it is apparently not widely used but appears in the colloquialism *apr xar luspe* 'X is disorientated' (literally glossable as 'sail X.has.it reversed'). Interestingly, in parts of western Georgia, *apra* has another meaning, namely 'the central up-

right wooden plank in the wall of a traditional dwelling, with grooves on either side into which the horizontal planks are fitted', and the identical lexeme has this meaning in Mingrelian. In fact, Nikolaj Marr suggested that the ultimate source of this word is not Georgian but Abkhaz, where /á.pra/ also means 'sail' and might be related to the verbal root /-pər-/ 'fly',³ though, of course, the root for 'flying' in Georgian also happens to be /-pr-/. As for *andza*, an old meaning is 'pointed pole, attachment to which served as a punishment', and, perhaps significantly, it is only this latter sense which the Svan-Georgian dictionary illustrates with three examples, one of which is *anss dzhirk'ine* 'I'll suspend you on a pointed object' (p. 52).

Kartvelian commentators (but not Rayfield, as far as I am aware) desirous of establishing a historical Svan presence on Abkhazian soil have argued that the forerunner of the toponym 'Sukhum(i)', namely 'Tskhum-i', attested in the Georgian Chronicles, is to be derived from Svan *tskhwim(ra)* 'hornbeam' (cf. 'Tskhumari', the name of a village in Upper Svanetia). I have in the past suggested that one does not need to look to Svan for an origin of this form of the toponym. A suburb on the eastern fringe of the Abkhazian capital (itself not known as Sukhum(i) but *Aq^w'a* in Abkhaz) has the name 'Th^wibin' [t^wə'bən]. One might postulate that the non-Kartvelian consonant-cluster at the start could have produced the affricate-fricative sequence [tsχ], whilst [bən] could well have been reduced to [m], the loss of the plosive causing the nasal to shift from alveolar to bilabial position, and the labialisation of the Abkhaz pharyngeal fricative combining with the following schwa to give Georgian [u]. Thus, the evidence for the Svans' maritime residence turns out to be highly tenuous, if indeed it can be said to exist at all, a fact of which (most of) Rayfield's readers would be blissfully unaware. But there is still more to be said about the Svans and their language.

It was noted above in passing that in the Georgian tradition the Laz and Mingrelian languages are regarded as co-dialects of a language named Zan. Though this root has disappeared from both Laz and Mingrelian (begging the question that the item did indeed once exist in them too),

³ See Marr's 1938 *On the Language and History of the Abkhazians*, in Russian, and V. A. Chirikba 'Abkhaz Loans in Megrelian' published in *Iran and the Caucasus*, 10.1, 2006: 25-76, but also available at: <http://www.academia.edu/571278/Abkhaz_Loans_in_Megrelian>.

the Svan language possesses (?preserves) the following terms: *mə.zän* 'one Mingrelian', *zan.är* 'Mingrelians' and *zän* 'Mingrelia'. On the assumption that the root was indeed borrowed into Svan and not an independent Svan creation, it is reasonable to hypothesise that this set of lexemes will have entered the language before the historical dialect-continuum, constituted by the Laz-Mingrelians' Zan ancestors, was split by incoming, westward-moving Georgian speakers, after which the Laz (Ch'an) community became far removed from Svanetia, leaving the terms to apply exclusively to the Mingrelians and their territory. And, to extend the assumptions, would it not be churlish to deny a connection between the root of Svan's three terms and the Graeco-Roman ethnonyms *Sán(n)oi* and *Sanni* encountered above? Dzhnanashia addressed this question in his aforementioned 1959 article. He argued that, if the native term had begun with a voiced fricative, then, as Greek's letter zeta had developed precisely this phonetic realisation (from its original phonetic value of [zd]) some time in the 4th century B.C., this is how Greek (and later Roman) writers would have elected to represent the ethnonym. But since the Greeks chose sigma (= [s]), Dzhnanashia speculates that the original native articulation was probably this voiceless fricative. Later a differentiation is noticed, whereby Greek *Tzánnoi* is attested for designation of the people living to the south of the said geographical range, whereas this neologism is not applied to those further north. The unusual initial complex in the Greek must have been an attempt to render a non-Greek sound, and the obvious native sound would be the voiceless ejective palato-alveolar affricate in word-initial position of one of the local terms for the Laz, namely the initial [tʃ] of *ch'an.i* 'Laz (person)', the Greek *Lazoi* representing the name by which this ethnic group soon became (and is still) more widely known, and from which the kingdom of *Laziké*: 'Lazica', which flourished over (at least part of the former) Colchis from the 1st to the 7th century A.D., took its name. Considering all of this, Dzhnanashia postulated two sound-shifts: in the south of the range [san] became [tʃ'an], whilst in the north the development was [san] to [zan] to [ts'an], this last giving rise to the Abkhazian term *a.ts'án.k^wa*, a people who in Abkhazian folklore were a race of dwarfs living in the mountains prior to the arrival of the giant Narts of the Abkhazian (and, indeed, Circassian and Ossetic) national epic. According to this hypothesis, the Svan terms with which we began the

discussion would have entered the language during the middle stage of the ethnonym's northern phonetic development, subsequently disappearing from Mingrelian and never having existed in this precise form in Laz.

The problem with Džhanashia's ingenious proposal is that it is rather hard to imagine such totally unmotivated phonetic shifts as those of [s] to [z] and then [z] to [ts'], to say nothing of the quite exceptional [s] to [tʃ], all in *anlaut*. I would suggest that [zan] is actually original (consider such toponyms in Mingrelia as *Zana* and *Zanati*), but perhaps because it might not have been fully voiced in word-initial position, it might not have been perceived as sufficiently voiced to be captured in the Greek script by the letter zeta rather than sigma; a further consideration is that zeta was anyway far from being the commonest word-initial consonant in the ancient Greek language. Despite the parallel presence of the sequence [an] in the relevant terms, there is no proof that Abkhaz *a.ts'án* is connected to the ethnonym *zan*, which is presumed to have disappeared in favour of *ma.rg.ali* in Mingrelian in the north, just as its replacement by *ch'an.i* in the south might have been coincidental and introduced from some subgroup of the southern Zans (or perhaps from some totally unrelated but neighbouring people?)—Procopius in his *De Bello Gothico* (VIII.1), whilst accepting that the Laz of his day (6th century A.D.) were to be identified with the former 'Colchians', described the *Tzánoi*, the contemporary designation of the *Sánnoi*, as living far removed from the sea, next to the Armenians. Though the term *ch'an.i* has survived, it seems it was largely and quite swiftly superseded by *laz.i* (source of Greek *Lazóí*), possibly because of an unfortunate semantic association—in Mingrelian, the second meaning of *ch'an.i* is 'impotent'.

The need for the above-exkursus on *zan* becomes clear in the context of Rayfield's etymology of 'Laz', which he boldly states 'derives from the Svan "la-zan" meaning "country of the Zan (Laz)"' (p. 14). This proposal is again not further ascribed, but the speculation actually originated with Nikolaj Marr at the start of the 20th century. For example, in his article 'From a journey to Turkish Lazistan' (1910, p. 607, in Russian) he refers to his own suggestion of five years previously (contained in his edition and translation of the Arabic version of Agathangehos' *The Baptism of the Armenians, Georgians, Abkhazians and Alans by St. Gregory*, 1905, in Russian) whereby he saw the term 'as a hellenised form of the name of the

country of the “Zans” or of the very same Ch’ans. It is built with the aid of the prefix *la*: *la-z[ən]-i*. This formation is neither Ch’an nor Mingrelian: it is perhaps the remnant of some language of the Svan group of the Japhetic branch’—note the ‘perhaps’. There are problems with this etymology, though. As noted, the Svan name of the country inhabited by the Zans (latterly the Mingrelians) is simply *zän*, totally free of affixation, just like the Svans’ native term for their own country, namely *shwän*. Svan does possess a circumfix *lə...u* (or *lu...u*) which can wrap around roots used for peoples or their lands, so that we have *lə.zn.u* and *lu.shn.u*, but such derivatives are merely adjectives of place meaning ‘Mingrelian’ and ‘Svan(ian)’ (e.g. *lu.sh.nu anban* ‘Svan alphabet’), respectively. And so, Svan provides no evidence of the specific derivational morphology presupposed in Marr’s (or Rayfield’s) etymology. Even though Mak’alattia quoted this etymology in his 1941 history of Mingrelia, Marr himself had already rejected it in his 1923 work ‘How does Japhetic Linguistics Live?’ (p. 38, in Georgian), where he preferred to link ‘Laz’ with ‘Pelagian’. Dzhnashia (1959.27) rightly dismissed both etymologies. The origin of the said ethnonym is, in fact, uncertain.

There remains one further instance where Rayfield overstates the historical role of the Svans, and the examination of this moves us to the reign of Emperor Justinian I in the 6th century. On p. 49, we read of the Svans revolting against the Byzantines in 555-6 and slaughtering their general Soterichus. Again, predictably, no source is cited for these events. But if one turns to the text of the relevant historian, Agathias Scholasticus (c. 530-582/594 A.D.), who chronicled the years 552-8, one will seek in vain for any mention of the Svans in these particular contexts. The people responsible, according to Agathias, were the *Misimianoí* ‘Missimians’. Who were they? Classicist Simon Q’aukhchishvili had argued, in harmony with a range of Georgian commentators (plus Rayfield), as early as 1936 that they were (a tribe of the) Svans. The reasoning was that the local source could have been *mə.shwän*, which is the Svans’ self-designation ‘one Svan’ (plural *shwan.är*). At first glance, this looks extremely plausible, but a careful reading of Agathias’ text reveals this equation to be quite unsustainable.

As a point of geographical reference, we are told (Agathias IV.16) that ‘the fort of *Tibéleos*’ lies on the border of the territories of the Missimians and the Apsilians. This toponym is universally agreed to be the Greek

equivalent of the settlement known in Abkhaz as Ts'abal and in Georgian as Ts'ebelda, part way up Abkhazia's K'odor Valley. But as for the affair of Soterichus, the crucial testimony is presented by Agathias at III.15. Q'aukhchishvili incorporated Agathias' materials in volume III of his bilingual Greek-Georgian series *Georgica* (1936). And, if one translates into English Q'aukhchishvili's rendition of the Greek original, one ends up with the following: '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.' This English translation (like the Georgian version) is rather ambiguous as to which two of the three peoples mentioned are being contrasted in terms of their languages and customs: Missimians and Apsilians, or Missimians and Colchians. Is the Greek original equally open to contradictory interpretations? In fact, the structure of the Greek does not leave interpretation open to the uncertainty produced by lax translations of the kind just presented. The reason is that Greek possesses a pair of clitics (*men...de*) whose role is to accompany and thereby indicate each component of a contrasting pair. The relative clause here has the Missimians as its head, and within the clause stand these helpful clitics, the former following the complement 'subjects' (*katé:kooi*), the latter coming after the noun for 'language' (the Dative singular form of *gló:tte*). This makes the interpretation crystal clear: the Missimians, whilst they are subjects of the Colchians, differ from them in language and customs.⁴ The phrase 'like the Apsilians' (*kathárou kai hoi Apsíloi*) 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 these observations together with a further passage at IV.15, namely that the Missimians killed the ambassadors sent to them by the Apsilians despite the fact that the Apsilians were a 'common [?related—GH] and neighbouring people' (*Apsíllous ge óntas homodiáitous kai agkhítérmonas*), we can confidently conclude that Agathias provides unchallengeable testimony to the cultural and linguistic relatedness of the Apsilians and the Missimians. It must

⁴ I. G. Shtritter's late-18th-century translation into Russian introduced an unwarranted plural to give 'in languages and customs' (see Abkhazia's Holy Metropole's 2011-reprint *Avasgika, Apsilika, Misimianika*, in Russian).

be added that it would be wrong to infer from the above that the Svans have no role to play in Agathias' narrative—he places them as neighbours to the Alans (ancestors of the Ossetes), but, significantly for our purposes and quite naturally in view of the cultural and linguistic affinities he ascribes to them, Agathias makes no attempt to link them with the Missimians, which simply underscores the correctness of the Missimian-Apsilian association. And since it is beyond dispute that the Apsilians were the ancestors of the Abkhazians, the Missimians must have been just a sub-division of this ethnic group. The Greek ethnonym was, thus, in all likelihood an attempt to render the Abkhazian surname (or clan-name) *Marshan*, for the Marshan nobility traditionally lived around Ts'abal.

Whilst it might appear that the preceding discussion has gnawed excessively at the bones of relatively minor topics, I have judged it essential to go into such detail in reviewing opinions relating to the tribes and their distribution along the eastern Black Sea coast for the millennium from c. 500 B.C. to the 6th century A.D. not because of abstract academic interest but because these matters impinge directly on the major modern issue that is the ongoing Georgian-Abkhazian conflict, a fact of which many (?most) readers of Rayfield's history are likely to be totally unaware. Thus, when it comes to speculation about the regional identities that might lie behind a range of the ancient ethnonyms encountered above, it is impossible in every case to reach definitive conclusions, but one has to consider two alternatives:

On the basis of the available evidence, should one suppose there to have been significant differences in the sequential ordering of clans, tribes and/or peoples along the stretch of territory from Mingrelia northwards to the Kuban basin from that which obtained there prior to the mass-migrations of the North West Caucasian peoples to Ottoman lands at the close of the Caucasian and Russo-Turkish Wars in 1864 and 1877-78? Anyone believing this to be the case has to present the evidence in support of the arrival of this or that clan, tribe or people on this or that territory, stating whence they came and at what time.

Or

Might one not reasonably assume that the ancient terms simply masked essentially the (sub-)ethnic sequential distribution attested for later centuries—viz. northern Zans (= Mingrelians), Abkhazians (including the Sadz, 'Missimians' and 'Abask/goi'), Ubykhs, and Circassians (with the

Svans occupying the high valleys to the north(-east) of Mingrelia and Abkhazia)? Within this picture, the size of the territory belonging to this or that clan, tribe or people at different moments in history would have grown or diminished according as the power and influence of this or that clan, tribe or people waxed or waned.

It is generally accepted that the ancestors of the North West Caucasian peoples moved into their Caucasian homelands from the south along the coast of western Transcaucasia. Evidence for this is the consonantal sequence *-ps-*, from the proto-North West Caucasian root **psa/ə* 'water', in such hydronyms as *Akampsis/Apsaros*, ancient names for the R. Ch'orokhi (in Georgian = Turkish Çoruh), and the port of Supsa in Mingrelia. Rayfield alludes to this when (p. 15) he writes: 'Phasis may, like Apsari in the south, contain the Abkhaz root *-psa-*, "water".' This is but the first slip in the book in specific reference to the Abkhazians. Whilst the number of hydronyms containing reflexes of the root in Abkhazia is legion (e.g. *Haş.psa*, *Laş.psa*), to say nothing of North West Caucasian territory further north (e.g. the coastal town of Tuapse, analysable as West Circassian *t''a:psə* 'two water(s)/river(s)'; in Ubykh 'water' is *bzə*), Abkhaz itself has replaced this root in its basic lexeme for 'water', with the result that today 'water' in Abkhaz is *a.dzə* (stress on schwa); apart from in the aforementioned hydronyms, Abkhaz also preserves the original root for water in such compounds as *a.ps.lə* (stress on schwa) 'otter' (literally 'the.water.dog') or *a.ps.tá* 'gorge' (literally 'the.water.place').

So much, then, for ancient times. We can now move on to more modern periods and discuss Rayfield's remaining inaccuracies with reference to Abkhazia and Abkhazian themes, starting with a statement on demography. Failing again to cite any source, Rayfield gives (p. 300) for post-migration Abkhazia in 1864 population-figures of 38,000 Abkhazians vs 60,000 Mingrelians. Now, demographer Daniel Müller, who has spent years analysing the relevant data,⁵ states that there is no reliable source for the area until the Family Lists of 1886, wherein the total population of 68,773 was composed of three leading ethnic groups individually numbering: 28,323 Abkhazians, 3,558 Mingrelians, and 30,640 'Samurzaq'a-

⁵ See his article 'Demography' in *The Abkhazians: a Handbook*, from Curzon Press, 1999, edited by the present writer; along with Marc Junge, Müller has (personal communication) been investigating the effect of Stalin's nationality-policy on Abkhazia in 1937-8.

noans' (from the south-easternmost province of Samurzaq'an, more or less equatable with today's Gal District). The debate over just who the Samurzaq'anoans were could be said to be still a live issue today, but Müller concluded that there was greater reason to agree with the Abkhazian argument that (at least until their mingrelianisation had been finally achieved some time in the 20th century) the Samurzaq'anoans were correctly categorisable as Abkhazians. And so, Rayfield's figures for 1864 must be deemed to be highly dubious.

The Abkhazian Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR) was recognised by Georgia's Revolutionary Committee on 21 May 1921 but was reduced to a mere Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR) within the Georgian SSR on 21 February 1931. How, then, can Rayfield justify his assertion 'at first Abkhazia was an "independent Soviet republic"; within months, at Stalin's insistence, Abkhazia reverted to autonomy within Georgia' (p. 339)?

In the sentence spanning pp. 378-9, namely 'Even reputable linguists like Tamaz Gamq[']relidze subscribed to absurd theories that "Abkhaz" originally denoted Georgian tribes and that today's Abkhaz, now called Apsua, were impostors, who had recently crossed the Caucasus', how are readers likely to interpret the phrase 'now called Apsua'? Those in the know might realise that the meaning is that Georgians adhering to the absurd view alluded to in this citation call Abkhazians by their self-designation of 'Apswa' (plural 'Aspwaa') not out of respect but disparagingly to underline their alleged non-'Abkhazianness'. But, given the current wording, is this the universally obvious interpretation?

Even when it comes to events in Abkhazia that took place well within living memory, there are too many instances where Rayfield either has not checked his facts or is not sufficiently careful in his choice of words to ensure that the reader will properly understand what is being described. Pages 382-84 alone are in need of urgent and fundamental amendments.

The fuse to war was slow-burning but seemingly remorseless from 1988-89, and the build-up included the unconstitutional coup against Georgia's democratically elected president, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, over the 1991-92 New Year period. The junta that took over, faced with a generally deteriorating situation, which included a civil war based in Mingrelia between supporters of the ousted (Mingrelian) president and those backing the coup, invited the former Party Boss in Georgia and former Soviet For-

eign Minister, Edward Shevardnadze, to return to his homeland to head a State Council. Shevardnadze accepted and returned to Georgia in March 1992. Though without any kind of popular mandate (elections were scheduled for October), Shevardnadze's Western friends, despite the fact that he was now in a completely different environment (indeed country) from the one with which they associated him (viz. the Soviet Union), chose to ignore the realities of the state of affairs in Georgia and granted the country in quick succession not only recognition and the establishment of diplomatic relations but also membership of the World Bank, the IMF and, most importantly of all, the United Nations. Within two weeks of this last boon being granted, Georgian forces blasted their way into Abkhazia, sparking the 14-month war on the morning of 14 August. Thus, Rayfield's timeline is faulty when 'Abkhazian guerrillas' are seemingly said to have been repelling the Georgian army in Abkhazia within days [sic] of Shevardnadze's return (p. 382).

Prior to the start of the war Abkhazia, in the chaos raging in neighbouring Mingrelia because of the civil war mentioned above, there were instances of kidnapping. Given the statement on p. 383 'When Shevardnadze's interior minister went to Sukhumi to negotiate, he and his entourage were kidnapped', most readers would probably infer (as did some commentators at the time) that the kidnappers were Abkhazian, whereas in fact they were Mingrelian supporters of ousted President Gamsakhurdia. Though there were rumours that the kidnapped minister and others accompanying him had been spirited across the R. Ingur and were being held in Abkhazia's Gal District, the whole affair was an intra-Kartvelian matter; it had nothing to do with the Abkhazians.

A comparison of the same events at the start of the Abkhazian war in the accounts of Rayfield, on the one hand, and the Abkhazian Jurij Anchabadze, on the other hand, is revealing. Here is Rayfield (p. 383):

On 14 August the Abkhaz mobilized...[T]he Georgians sent marines to seize Gagra and cut off Abkhazia from Russia, and then besieged Sukhumi's parliament. They withdrew from Sukhumi when their hostages were released, but made General K[it]ovani military commander of the city. The Abkhaz president Ardzinba's government fled north to the Russian army base at Gudauta and called on the north Caucasian peoples to aid Abkhazia. The response was extraordinary.

Here is Anchabadze (from his article 'The Modern Period' in Curzon Press' 1999 *The Abkhazians: a Handbook*):

Already by the afternoon of August 14th the Georgian military had entered Sukhum, capturing the government buildings, the TV centre, and the main lines of communication. Vladislav Ardzinba, the Supreme Soviet and the government were forced to abandon Sukhum and decamp to Gudauta. On August 15th a naval landing-party disembarked in the Gagra region.

It should additionally be noted that the release of the hostages *by their Mingrelian captors* had no bearing whatsoever on events in Abkhazia; Ardzinba at that time was Chairman of the Supreme Soviet and only became President in 1994; the legitimate Abkhazian authorities moved to Gudauta because the Gudauta Region was the only one of the administrative units of Abkhazia where Abkhazians formed an absolute majority of the population following the late-19th-century mass-migrations and the subsequent mass-implantation of mainly Mingrelians during the years of the Stalin-Beria supremacy (1937-54); they installed themselves in the building of the Gudauta Regional Administration (not the Russian military base). The response that Rayfield finds so 'extraordinary', namely the influx of fighters from the North Caucasus (including Cossacks) to defend the Abkhazians was, in fact, entirely predictable, as the Confederation of Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus under its leader, Kabardian professor of sociology Musa Shanibov, had been aware of the potential need for such military assistance since the Confederation's (or, as it was initially known, Assembly's) formation in Sukhum in the wake of the first Georgian-Abkhazian ethnic clashes in the summer of 1989, which resulted from the dangerous rise of Georgian chauvinism and its focusing on the republic's ethnic minorities as the Kremlin's grip on the USSR began to be prised open from late 1988.

At the top of p. 384 there is reference to the notorious (videod!) threat of genocide against the Abkhazians made by the man who at the time was in charge of the Georgian forces operating in Abkhazia, General Gia Q'arq'arashvili. The sentence reads: 'While Q[']arq[']arashvili promised to exterminate the Abkhaz nation, Yeltsin arranged a ceasefire on 20 May 1993'. This sloppy wording might be read as assigning simultaneity to these events, whereas the Georgian general's threat had been made in the autumn of 1992.

In the very next paragraph Rayfield offers his reader the following 'information': 'In July, when most Georgian troops had left, the Abkhaz besieged Sukhumi and purged Kartvelian (largely Mingrelian) villages around the city. In villages like Kamani men, women and children were tortured and murdered in cold blood'. Firstly, one would like to hear what evidence supports the claim that in July 1993 'most Georgian troops had left' Abkhazia. Secondly, whilst it must be acknowledged that the Abkhazians and their allies were by no means entirely blameless in the matter of abuses of human rights during the war, anyone making specific charges of what would manifestly amount to a war-crime has to be absolutely certain of their facts. Rayfield's accusation of a massacre at Kaman would seem to have been lifted straight from a Wikipedia page entitled 'The Kamani Massacre'.⁶ And another passage from this latter source surfaced on 22 March 2013 in Maxim Edwards' article 'Abkhazia: recognising the ruins' on the Open Democracy website,⁷ wherein Edwards speaks of a local Georgian priest named Andrej being forced to kneel and state to whom Abkhazia belongs. Upon hearing his answer 'God', he was allegedly shot. Eye-witnesses on the Abkhazian side absolutely deny there is any truth to the website's assertions, dismissing them as nothing more than a typical example of Georgia's tireless myth-making industry. They maintain that, apart from some old folk sheltering in the monastery, the village had been evacuated prior to the assault. Father Andrej was one of those engaged in a shoot-out from the actual monastery and was killed in the general battle to regain control of the village, which cost the lives of 18 (plus 40 wounded) on the Abkhazian side—cf. V. Pachulija *The Georgian-Abkhazian War 1992-1993*, 2010, p. 201, in Russian. There simply were no women and children to be 'tortured and murdered'.

The third paragraph on the page would appear to be alleging yet another war-crime: 'The Abkhaz downed two aircraft carrying refugees'. Contrast that with what was published at the time in *Covcas Bulletin* (III.20 p. 8 for 29 September, 1993), according to which on 24 September Abkhazia's Supreme Soviet put out a press-statement, including the following:

⁶ Available at the time this article was composed at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kamani_massacre>.

⁷ Available at the time at <<http://www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/maxim-edwards/abkhazia-recognising-ruins>>.

Georgian forces are using the Sukhum airport to bring in reinforcements and supplies. As such, all aircraft using the airport will be subject to the provisions of Article 22 of the Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War. Thus, between 21 and 23 September, Abkhazian forces shot down five aircraft flying in or out of Sukhum which did not comply with the provisions of Article 22. By contrast, other aircraft which complied with the provisions of Article 22 flew in and out of Sukhum airport unhindered; Abkhazian forces have shot down three SU-25 Georgian air-force jets bombing Abkhazian positions.

The two main incidents occurred on 21 and 22 September when a TU-134 (flying from Sochi) and a TU-154 (flying from Tbilisi) were brought down approaching Sukhum's airport, the first incident causing the loss of 27 lives, whilst 108 perished in the second. Refugees, it goes without saying, were not flying INTO Abkhazia, and so it is unarguable that the dead on these planes could not fall into that category.

In the penultimate paragraph on the page, Rayfield moves on to developments in Mingrelia in the wake of Georgia's defeat in the war in Abkhazia. Gamsakhurdia had arrived back on Georgian soil after his exile in (former Soviet general) President Dzhokhar Dudaev's Chechenia. In the Mingrelian capital (Zugdidi) he is alleged to have demanded Mingrelian independence. In fact, Gamsakhurdia had never been a Mingrelian nationalist/separatist—what he wanted was the return of his presidency of the whole of Georgia. And, as his movement started a push eastwards towards Georgia's second city of Kutaisi, Rayfield says that Shevardnadze, having delayed disbanding the Mkhedrioni ('Cavalry'), an informal armed band of ruffians created by one of the leaders of the junta who had overthrown Gamsakhurdia, Dzhaba Ioseliani, 'now loosed them on the Mingrelians'. This is odd, for the Mkhedrioni had been marauding in Mingrelia prior to the start of the war in Abkhazia. Indeed, spending a short time in Abkhazia in July 1992, I personally recall being astonished as I watched Ioseliani (now dead) on Georgian television, which could at that time still be picked up in Abkhazia, boasting about the number of Mingrelians his men had slaughtered in the town of Ts'alendzhikha.

On p. 391, Rayfield ascribes the initial leadership of war-time Abkhazia to a 'triumvirate' consisting of Hittite specialist Vladislav Arzinba, archae-

ologist Yuri Voronov,⁸ and historian Stanislav Lakoba. Whilst all three certainly played important roles in Abkhazia at the time, and the last went on to do so, serving twice as Chairman of the Security Council, once under President Sergej Bagapsh and again under his successor Aleksandr Ankvab, I strongly doubt that many in Abkhazia would recognise the assumption that power lay in just these three pairs of hands. Regarding Ardzinba, whilst Rayfield is probably correct to speak of Ardzinba's debilitating illness, which started to take effect around 1999, weakening Abkhazia, just as the country had been stunned in 1995 by Voronov's assassination, it is simply not true that during his period out of politics 'Lakoba became a Moscow academic' (as he has personally confirmed to me); he did, however, spend some time researching and writing at a Japanese university.

In the second paragraph on p. 391, in the context of a group of Chechen mercenaries being contracted in the autumn of 2001 by the Shevardnadze government to be ferried across Georgia from the P'ank'isi Gorge (south of Chechenia) into Abkhazia's Upper K'odor Valley, which had remained under Tbilisi's control after the 1992-3 war and from where they were to launch attacks inside Abkhazia, we read: '...the hard men running Abkhazia were infuriated: there was general mobilization in Abkhazia, and a UN helicopter was shot down on 8 October. Russian aircraft bombed the upper K[']odori valley.' A minor point would be to ask for elucidation as to the identity of these 'hard men', for, although no longer so regularly seen in public, Ardzinba was controlling events in the background, while the government was fronted by his wife's cousin, Prime Minister Anri Dzhergenia, a lawyer and one-time Procurator General of Abkhazia. But the shooting down of the helicopter with the loss of nine lives (including UN personnel) is by far the more important point here. The helicopter was brought down over that part of the valley which was under Georgian control and was thus NOT an atrocity committed by the Abkhazians, as was charged by an excited member of staff at the Georgian Embassy in London on Radio 4's *Today* programme on the day that news of the atrocity broke. And the claim that Russians bombed the valley at that time is totally without foundation.

⁸ A scholar who, incidentally, had been one of those correctly interpreting Agathias' material in associating the Missimians with the Apsilians.

Speaking of the fateful year 2008, Rayfield writes: 'In spring Saak[']ashvili boasted of taking control of the upper K[']odori valley' (p. 397). This would have been an odd thing for him to do at that precise moment, since, as already stated, the upper valley was already controlled by the Georgian authorities in Tbilisi and Saak'ashvili had strengthened his government's position there when in 2006 he contravened the 1994 ceasefire-agreement by moving Georgian troops into the area and then started demonstratively lavishing funds on the local Svan-occupied villages in a futile attempt to demonstrate to the Abkhazians that financial advantages would flow, should they again throw in their lot with Georgia. Moving on to the war-month of August, Rayfield refers to the movement of 150 Georgian tanks on the 6th of that month, adding the phrase 'some deterring the Abkhaz'. But, since there were no Georgian tank-movements in the vicinity of Abkhazia, it is unclear what one is meant to make of this remark.

In the book's Chronology, it is incorrect to state that Abkhazia was resettled by Mingrelians in the years 1864-6 (p. 423)—see the earlier discussion of the demography. Mingrelian ethnographer Tedo Sakhok'ia wrote in 1903 (in a series of newspaper-articles, republished as the final chapter 'Abkhazia' in his *Journeys* in 1985, in Georgian) of Mingrelians flooding into Abkhazia in the wake of the Russo-Turkish war of 1877-8, where they revived commercial activity, but the truly massive importation of Mingrelians took place, as stated earlier, in the years of 1937-54.

Abkhazians reading this book would surely conclude that they and their history merited a greater commitment firstly to establishing and then to presenting relevant facts to his readers than regrettably demonstrated by Rayfield in respect of the points discussed above, whilst a general reader could be excused for feeling cheated of the chance to gain a complete understanding of some of the issues where Abkhazia and Abkhazians impinge on Georgian history and/or politics. Since, as noted at the outset, resolution of the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict remains one of the major obstacles to the development of Transcaucasia that everyone had hoped to see following the disintegration of the USSR, the deficiencies described in Rayfield's book can only serve to perpetuate the decidedly pro-Georgian bias that has blighted the West's response to this conflict since the beginning of its half-hearted and largely ignorance-based engagement over two decades ago.

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