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**THE VALUE OF THE PAST:
MYTHS, IDENTITY AND POLITICS
IN TRANSCAUCASIA**

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Part II

THE GEORGIAN-ABKHAZIAN CONFLICT

CHAPTER 1

A REPUBLIC WITH RESTRICTED SOVEREIGNTY

From the 1920s to the beginning of the 1930s, many administrative formations had managed to upgrade their political status in the USSR. Yet, there were republics and provinces whose status was permanently reduced (for example, see Menteshashvili 1990: 62). One of them was Abkhazia.

It is no accident that Abkhazia is called the pearl of the Black Sea region. Occupying the northern part of the Colchis lowlands, Abkhazia is well known first for its mild climate. Second, it is situated at the crossing of trade routes and cultural interactions. Third, it is very rich in precious subtropical fruits and medicinal plants. Fourth, it is famous for opportunities for recreational activities and, at the same time, is an important military-strategic bridge between Eastern Europe, on the one hand, and Transcaucasia and Asia Minor, on the other. From early times, the indigenous population of Abkhazia was made up of the Abkhazians, who were related in terms of language to the Adyghe of the northwestern Caucasus. The Abkhazian and the Adyghe languages constitute a branch of the distinct North Caucasian family of languages, which is unrelated to the Kartvelian (South Caucasian) family of languages, of which Georgian is a member.

The Mingrelians live south of the Abkhazians. Their language is a special branch of the Kartvelian family of languages and is different from Georgian proper in many respects. Until the very end of the 1920s, the authenticity of the Mingrelians and their language was officially recognized, their population numbers were recorded in the national census, and a number of publications were issued in Mingrelian. In 1931-1935, a newspaper was published in Mingrelian. Moreover, there were some plans to establish Mingrelian autonomy in 1925, and even at the very end of the 1920s (Shengelaia 1991: 78; Marykhuba 1994b: 57-58). Yet, this development was soon terminated, and the Mingrelians together with the Svans and Ajars were recorded as Georgians in the national census of 1939 (Marykhuba 1994b: 58). Moreover, their distinct history, historical sites and territories began to be appropriated by Georgian historians. For example, while identifying the legendary Colchians with the Laz (Mingrelian-Chans), and the latter with the “early Georgians”, Georgian historians, as we will see later on, viewed the classical Greek myth of the Argonauts as part of the priceless Georgian historical heritage (Hewitt 1993: 268, 317, note 9, 1995a, 1995b: 52-53; Goldenberg 1994: 85-86).

The mighty states struggled with each other for possession of Abkhazia for

centuries – Byzantium, Persia, the Caliphate, the Ottoman Empire and Russia took part in this dispute. Georgia laid its claim to Abkhazia as well, but it was more often than not involved in internal strife. During most of the medieval period, it consisted of separate kingdoms or principalities that united but for short periods and then soon broke apart. Abkhazia was one of those polities that was only an integral part of the united Georgian-Abkhazian state in the 10th – 13th centuries. Later on, Abkhazia was either in an alliance with neighboring principalities, or was in fact subordinated for periods, or was developing quite independently.

Beginning in the 16th century, Western Georgia, including Abkhazia, was increasingly more affected by the Ottoman Empire. True, the Abkhazian Shervashidze (Chachba) Dynasty still managed to hang on to its rule. By the turn of the 19th century, Islam was rather popular in Abkhazia, and the country was politically and culturally oriented towards the Ottoman Empire, in contrast to many other Georgian principalities. In the meantime, the Russian-Ottoman confrontation of the late 18th – early 19th century concluded with Russian victory, and a substantial part of Transcaucasia joined the Russian Empire. It is interesting to note that Georgia was integrated by Russia as several separate principalities rather than as a consolidated political body. Abkhazia was one of the last polities to join Russia, which it did in 1810 (Suny 1988: 64; Hewitt 1993: 270-271; Colarusso 1995: 77). Over the next half a century, it enjoyed being ruled by its own titled prince. However, after some Abkhazian tribes took part in the unsuccessful anti-colonial war of the Caucasian highlanders against Russian power, Abkhazia lost its autonomous status. It was reorganized in 1864 into a distinct “Sukhum Military Department” (“District”, after 1883) within the Kutaisi Military Province. After that, for more than half a century, Abkhazia was run by Russian officials and lost its very name. Its name was restored in 1918, however (Lakoba 1990a: 7, 32). Meanwhile, Russian secular and religious authorities did their best to convert the Abkhazians to Russian Orthodox Christianity and to Russify them entirely. To achieve this goal, the city of Gagra with its surroundings was included in the Sochi region of the Black Sea Province between 1904 and 1917 (Lakoba 1998a: 87). Some Abkhazian intellectuals attempted to resist this development, and in 1916, they required the Russian authorities to transform the whole Sukhum District to a distinct Sukhum Province, or at least to unite it with Kutaisi Province¹).

National awakening commenced in Abkhazia in 1910-1917, when, on the one hand, local intellectuals began to call for it, and on the other hand, the Abkhazians felt great self-esteem because the Abkhazian cavalry detachment had become famous for its heroic deeds during World War I. The February Revolution of 1917 finally awakened the Abkhazians to an active political life. A Committee for Public Security was established in Sukhum on March 10, 1917, which declared itself a local body of the Russian Provisional Government. The Committee was headed by the Abkhazian Prince, A. Shervashidze. During the time of political crisis and anarchy in the fall 1917, the Abkhazians wanted first to align themselves with some form of a regional federal state. With that idea in mind, they took part in the signing

of the "Union Treaty" and the establishment of the Southeastern Union of Cossack Forces, Caucasian Highlanders and Free Peoples of the Steppe on October 20, 1917. As a result, the United Government of the Southeastern Union was established in Yekaterinodar (Lakoba 1990a: 60-62; Lakoba 1993: 281).

Simultaneously, the Congress of the Abkhazian People was held in Sukhum on November 8, 1917, through the initiative of the local socialists (Men'shevik). The Abkhazian People's Soviet (APS) was established, headed by Simon Basaria, a well known Abkhazian political activist, an advocate of the political and cultural rights of the Caucasian Highlanders²). The Congress adopted the Declaration of the Congress of the Abkhazian People and the Constitution of the Abkhazian People's Soviet. Both documents emphasized the cultural authenticity of the Abkhazian people and their distinct history, and manifested the Abkhazian people's aspiration for political self-determination. The discussion of the form of the proclaimed self-determination was delayed until the Constituent Assembly of the Peoples of Russia could be held. At the same time, close relationships with the North Caucasian Highlanders were stressed as a political priority³), and Georgia was hardly mentioned in those documents at all. The APS was declared a "national political organization, uniting all the Abkhazian people". Simultaneously, the protection of the rights of ethnic minorities was proclaimed (Basaria 1923: 86-89).

Only at the beginning of 1918 did the APS take steps towards the adjustment of its relationships with Georgia. It signed an agreement with the National Soviet of Georgia on February 9, which stated that Georgia recognized an integrated Abkhazia within its borders, between the Inguri and Mzymta Rivers. Yet, the issue of the political arrangement of Abkhazia was left open. In accordance with their Congress' decision, the Abkhazians claimed political independence, whereas the Georgians had offered them the autonomous status of Abkhazia within the Georgian republic. True, the Georgians agreed to recognize the principle of national self-determination (Menteshashvili 1990: 11; Lakoba 1993: 285; Hewitt 1993: 278).

In the spring of 1918, Abkhazia witnessed two Bolshevik coups, the arrival of the Transcaucasia Federation's troops in Sukhum, and, finally, the proclamation of the Georgian Democratic Republic on May 26. In response to the latter, on June 2, the APS stated that all previous agreements with Georgia had lost their legal basis, and declared itself the only organ of political power in Abkhazia. Still, it expressed its desire for help from Georgia in organizing local power structures. On June 8-11, the Georgian oriented APS delegation signed a treaty with Georgia by which Abkhazia joined Georgia as an autonomous body and received financial support. Georgia was granted the right to send a military detachment to introduce order to Abkhazia. Yet, the Congress of all the Population of Abkhazia had to make the final decision on the form of government in the region (Menteshashvili 1990: 15-16; Hewitt 1993: 279)⁴).

Under the pretext of the struggle against the Bolsheviks, the entire seacoast from Sukhum to Tuapse was occupied in late June – July by Georgian troops headed by General Mazniev (Mazniashvili) who, in violation of the previous treaty,

was appointed General Governor of Abkhazia. In response, some APS members recruited a group of the Abkhazian maxadzhirians in Turkey and landed in the Kodor area of Abkhazia. The Georgian forces successfully beat off this attack (Lakoba 1993: 296-301, 2001a; Gamakharia, Gogia 1997: 77-78). Being suspicious of the local Abkhazian inhabitants' sympathies with Turkey, the Georgian troops arranged a massacre in the Kodor area in August 1918, and introduced restrictions on the free movement of Abkhazians in some areas of Abkhazia (Basaria 1923: 94-96, 1984: 16). The Georgian authorities attempted to hold an inquiry into the case but without any visible results (Menteshashvili 1990: 24-25). In the meantime, Georgian was officially introduced as the only language of the local bureaucracy, and the Abkhazian alphabet was abolished as the "invention of Russian officials". Everything was done in order to implement the instruction of the Georgian leader, Noy Zhordania, in the "Georgianization of the Abkhazians" (Sagaria 1989a, 1989b; Marykhuba 1994b: 18; Lakoba 2001a)⁵. Because of these developments, the Congress of the Population of Abkhazia, which was obliged to discuss the issue of the political organization of Abkhazia, was delayed for an indefinite period. In August 1918, the APS declared its dissolution, stating it was in protest against the brutal actions of Georgia (Basaria 1923: 91-92). In fact, however, it was broken up because of being accused of Turkophilic attitudes (Lakoba 1993: 301, 2001a)⁶.

Yet, the new APS, dominated by ethnic Georgians, turned out to be no more obedient. It appealed to the commander of the Volunteer Army, General M. S. Alexeev, requesting help to cleanse Abkhazia of Georgian troops. To resolve the issue, a conference was held at General Alexeev's headquarters on September 12-13, with participation by the representatives of the Georgian Republic, Kuban' Province government, and the Volunteer Army. Since they disagreed on all the points, the opposite sides were not able to reach a compromise. Soon thereafter, the Kuban' representative, Nikolai Vorobiev, published a pamphlet (Vorobiev 1990) which argued that Russia had more reasons to own Abkhazia than Georgia did⁷. Later on, we will see that, for years, the Georgian historians did their best to disprove the main arguments of this pamphlet.

In the beginning of October, the Georgian authorities broke up the disloyal APS once again, accusing it of plotting to break away from Georgia. After that, Abkhazia witnessed a wave of mass arrests. Not only some former APS leaders, but also many well educated Abkhazians and renowned elders were put onto jail (Basaria 1923: 93). The Georgian arguments for this campaign were illogical: on the one hand, these people were accused of having sympathy with landlords as well as being loyal to Russia; on the other hand, they were suspected of being Bolsheviks and Turkophiles (Menteshashvili 1990: 22-23, 25-26; Gamakharia, Gogia 1997: 85).

The Volunteer Army and the Georgian Republic were still contesting Abkhazia in early 1919. A new commander-in-chief, General A. Denikin, demanded that Georgian troops and administrators be removed from Abkhazia. The Georgian authorities kept promising "broad autonomy" for Abkhazia, for, as Georgian

Minister of Internal Affairs, N. Ramishvili, claimed, the Abkhazian people were not ready for independence. As a result, democratic elections were held in Abkhazia, and the new People's Soviet of Abkhazia (PSA) was established in March 1919, dominated by the Georgian Mensheviks. On March 20, they passed their "Decree of the Abkhazian Autonomy" within the Democratic Republic of Georgia. This plan was welcomed by the deputies of the Constituent Assembly of Georgia. The latter worried about the strong anti-Georgian attitude in Abkhazia, where the great bulk of the population spoke Russian. They feared, first, an uprising if Abkhazia were denied political autonomy, and second an alliance with the Volunteer Army if it were granted independence. Thus, the decision for autonomy was an involuntary one; that is why, despite the Georgian leaders' many declarations (including those made at the international meetings), the implementation of the decision was delayed by every means (Lakoba 1990a: 74-77; Menteshashvili 1990: 40-41, 46-49, 50-52).

Instead, mass resettlement of Georgian peasants to Abkhazia was encouraged by the Georgian authorities, who allocated them former state and private plots of land. At the same time, the PSA was planning another future for those lands: the Abkhazians were dreaming of the repatriation of tens of thousands of maxadzhirians who had been forced to flee to Turkey in the 1860s – 1870s. Yet, while the appeal of the maxadzhirians was circulating in Georgian bureaucratic offices, Abkhazia was being populated by Georgian peasants (Basaria 1923: 83-85; Menteshashvili 1990: 41-42; Lakoba 1990a: 78).

Simultaneously, the dispute between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Georgian Church for the Abkhazians continued. Whereas the former had enjoyed an apparently advantageous position before the revolution, an initiative was taken by the latter under the Georgian Republic to establish the eparchy of the Georgian catholicosate in Abkhazia for the first time in centuries⁸). The relationships between both Churches were by no means friendly (Menteshashvili 1990: 7, 43-46; Gamakharia, Gogia 1997: 62-63, 66-67, 94-97).

In December 1920, the PSA delegation visited Tbilisi to negotiate with the representatives of the Constituent Assembly of Georgia. The Abkhazian delegates were shocked when they figured out that the Assembly had decided to resolve the issue of Abkhazian autonomy and to draw up a constitution for Abkhazia without discussing the matter with the Abkhazians themselves. Only after a protest had been lodged by the PSA did the Constitutional Committee commence drawing up a draft of the statement of Abkhazian autonomy. Under Article 107 of the new Constitution of Georgia, Abkhazia was named the "Sukhumi Province" and an inseparable part of Georgia. Its borders were established between the Inguri and Mekhadyr Rivers. The PSA was invested with the management of internal affairs in Abkhazia, and Georgian was declared the state language there, although the PSA was granted the right to introduce any local language as the language of instruction in school and for bureaucratic procedures. This quite contradictory draft was approved by the Constituent Assembly of Georgia on February 21, 1921, but it was already too late. The days were numbered until the establishment of Soviet power in Abkhazia

(Menteshashvili 1990: 47-49; B. Pipiia 1995: 215; Gamakharia, Gogia 1997: 108-110, 112; Lakoba 1993: 319-320; Lakoba 1998b: 92).

The excesses of the Georgian military in Abkhazia, the seizure of lands by the Georgian peasants, red tape concerning the issue of autonomy, the granting of Abkhazia with only restricted constitutional rights, the aspirations of Georgia's democratic leaders for the Georgianization of Abkhazia (for that, see Sagaria 1990a, 1990b), all ensured the Soviet power extensive support in Abkhazia. In the views of an Abkhazian scholar, the Abkhazians perceived the arrival of the Red Army in Sukhum on March 4, 1921, as their liberation from a regime of occupation. The declaration of the independent Soviet Socialist Republic of Abkhazia on March 31, 1921 met no less enthusiasm among the Abkhazians. The Abkhazian Bolsheviks claimed Abkhazian independence from Georgia, and in order to achieve that goal were even ready for Abkhazia to be taken into the Russian Federation. Moreover, while hoping to be granted independent status, they provided Soviet Russia with invaluable help in the arrangement of its successful negotiations with Turkey. All of this was their response to democratic Georgia's policies, which were met with discontent by all the inhabitants of Abkhazia, not by the ethnic Abkhazians alone (Lakoba 1990a: 79-83, 85, 1993: 320-322, 2001a; Hewitt 1993: 281)⁹.

In the spring of 1921, several meetings were held, with the participation of both the Abkhazian and Georgian Bolsheviks, who approved the decision for the establishment of the independent Abkhazian SSR, and the issue of its future unification with either the Russian Federation or Georgia was left open for the Congresses of the Soviets of Abkhazia and Georgia to decide. On May 28, the First Congress of the Soviets of Abkhazian Workers was held, which approved the decision for the independence of Abkhazia, and also manifested its aspiration for an alliance with other Soviet Republics. Yet, in practical terms, many members of the Caucasian Bureau of the RCP(b) as well as some members of the Local Bureau of the RCP(b) of Abkhazia believed that Abkhazia was not ready for economic independence, and that is why it had to make a close alliance with neighboring Georgia. The People's Commissar for Nationalities, Joseph Stalin, shared this approach, in particular. He not only claimed that "Abkhazia was an autonomous part of independent Georgia" but also put further financial pressure on it. As a result, Georgia and Abkhazia signed the Union treaty in December 1921, which was approved by the Congresses of Soviets of both Abkhazia and Georgia the next year. In the Constitution adopted by the Third All-Abkhazian Congress of Soviets in April 1925, the SSR Abkhazia was demoted to a Treaty Republic, i.e. it was declared a sovereign state, but strictly connected with Georgia. At the same time, Russian was granted state status, which, in fact, endorsed the existing situation. In 1926-1927, both Georgia and Abkhazia adopted new Constitutions, which provided their treaty relationships with legal status. These relationships lasted until February 1931, when the status of Abkhazia was reduced once again. A decision was made to reorganize it into an Autonomous SSR within the Georgian SSR. In 1937, Abkhazia lost its state symbols, and had to use the Georgian crest and banner (Menteshashvili

1990: 56-63; Lakoba 1990a: 83-84, 2001a; Dzapshba 1996: 48-52; Gamakharia, Gogia 1997: 117-126; Lakoba 1998b: 93-95).

At the same time, the reduction of political status did not affect the real situation in Abkhazia very much, until the death of the head of the Abkhazian government, Nestor Lakoba, in December 1936. Due to Lakoba's fairly flexible politics and his friendship with Stalin, Abkhazia avoided mass repression and enforced collectivization, enjoyed some measure of sovereignty, and maintained its cultural landscape until the late 1930s. Moreover, in order to secure this situation, Lakoba placed before Stalin the issue of the incorporation of Abkhazia into the Russian Federation several times (Lakoba 1990a: 110-126; Danilov 1990: 10-12).

Yet, Lakoba's plans never came to fruition. Abkhazia began to experience pressure while he was still alive. For example, uniform license plates with the label "Georgia" were introduced on all the cars under Beria's initiative in 1935. That was taken as a bad omen by the Abkhazians (Lakoba 1990a: 124). Radical changes came after 1936, and contemporary Abkhazian authors treated the period between 1937 and 1953 as the time of the de facto abolition of the Abkhazian SSR and the establishment of a regime of Georgian occupation (Lakoba 1990a: 86-97, 130-133. Also see Sagaria 1989, 1990a, 1990b; Dzapshba 1996; Otyrba 1994: 284-285; Marykhuba 1994b: 65-67). In 1937, Abkhazia suffered total collectivization, accompanied by mass repression (for example, see Danilov 1990: 12-15). More than 2,000 people were arrested between July 1937 and October 1938, and one third of them were executed by firing squads (Lakoba 1993: 345-347; Marykhuba 1994a: 119). The Abkhazian demographic losses are apparent from the following statistics: the share of the Abkhazians in Abkhazia dropped from 27.8 percent to 18.0 percent, between 1926 and 1939. True, the share of Georgians was also somewhat reduced – from 33.6 percent to 29.5 percent (Slider 1985: 52, table 1). However, the inflow of the Georgian (Mingrelian) population from western Georgia increased considerably in the following years, and in order to provide the new settlers with plots of land, land was withdrawn from the Abkhazian kolkhozes. Because of this policy, the Abkhazians became an ethnic minority at their own territory. Suffice it to say, over the following twenty years (between 1939 and 1959) the Georgian population in Abkhazia increased by 66,254 and the Abkhazian population by only 5,000 (Lakoba 1990a: 92; Lakoba 1993: 347-354; Sagaria 1990b)¹⁰.

In 1937-1938, the Georgian authorities moved to a policy of ethnocide. First, a new Abkhazian alphabet was invented based on the Georgian script. Then Abkhazian was pushed out of schools, and Georgian was introduced as the language of instruction instead. The Georgianization of local place names commenced. The Abkhazians were entirely forced out of the power structures by the mid-1940s. In brief, the hasty forcible integration of the Abkhazians into the Georgian entity was encouraged. In order to achieve this end, the Abkhazians were represented as one of the Georgian ethnic groups, and, as we shall see further on, Georgian scholars were developing their own version of ethnogenesis for them.

This policy reached its climax in the 1940s. In August – September 1941,

twenty renowned Abkhazian intellectuals were arrested, with S. Basaria among them. They were accused of the establishment of a nationalist organization and a plot against the Soviet regime. Most of them were soon shot to death¹¹). In March 1945, the Abkhazian Regional Branch of the Communist Party of Georgia (CPG) passed a decree on the introduction of Georgian as the language of instruction in Abkhazian schools, and this was approved by the Central Committee of the CPG in June that year. This decision was confirmed with reference to the “community of material and spiritual culture of the related Georgian and Abkhazian peoples”. In those days, the First Secretary of the Abkhazian Regional Branch of the CPG, A. Mgeladze, entirely denied the existence of a distinct Abkhazian language, and argued that the Abkhazians spoke distorted Georgian (Marykhuba 1994b: 66). In 1945-1946, Abkhazian was entirely forced out and replaced by Georgian as the language of instruction in schools. Then the ethnic composition of school staffs was drastically changed, and ethnic Georgians were hired first, all other things being equal. Georgian textbooks were introduced to replace the Russian and Abkhazian ones (Marykhuba 1994a: 81-82)¹²).

In August 1936, Sukhum was renamed Sukhumi, and the campaign for the Georgianization of Abkhazian place names commenced. Between 1948 and 1952, more than 147 localities were renamed in Abkhazia. In July 1946, signboards with Abkhazian inscriptions disappeared, and the Union of Writers of Abkhazia was renamed the Abkhazian Branch of the Union of Writers of Georgia. Newspapers and magazines in Abkhazian were closed down, and broadcasting in Abkhazian ceased. Simultaneously, the Abkhazian State Ensemble was renamed to the “State Ensemble of Georgian Folk Singers and Dancers”. From the early 1940s, the very term “Abkhazian people” was attacked (Marykhuba 1994a: 84-85, 90-91). The Abkhazians’ timid attempts to protest against this policy were treated by the authorities as the intrigues of “bourgeois nationalists” and were brutally persecuted (Sagaria 1990b; Lakoba 1990a: 92-96, 123; Marykhuba 1994a: 94-95; Dzaphsba 1996: 64-66; Slider 1985: 53-54; Hewitt 1993: 281-282, 1995b: 57)¹³).

Moreover, the total resettlement of the Abkhazians out of Abkhazia was planned in the early 1950s, and it is no accident that separate chapters in the book by the Georgian self-educated specialist in history of literature, Pavle Ingoroqva, were published in 1949-1951. As we shall see later on, this author argued that the Abkhazians were newcomers who had arrived in Abkhazia relatively recently (Lakoba 1990a: 97-98; 2000: 17; Marykhuba 1994b: 32-33; Hewitt 1993: 281-282, 1995b: 57). The Abkhazians were lucky in that they had avoided being deprived of their homeland. The Greeks had been resettled to Kazakhstan from Abkhazia in 1949, and they only managed to come back in 1954 (Mamulidi 1989; Keshanidi 1989).

Only after Stalin’s death and the dismissal of Beria were measures taken in 1953-1955 to restore justice and to give the Abkhazians back their legal rights. The Presidium of the CC CPSU passed a decree on June 10, 1956, “On the errors and shortcomings of the activities of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of

Georgia". It recognized that a "policy aimed at the elimination of the national culture of the local Abkhazian, Armenian and Ossetian populations was implemented, and their forcible assimilation was carried on" in Georgia. After that, Abkhazian schools were restored, courses were reintroduced in the Abkhazian language and literature. The fired Abkhazian teachers were reinstated. The Abkhazian alphabet, based on the Russian script, became popular once again, and the former names of some localities were restored (Sagaria 1990b).

Beginning in 1947, an Abkhazian struggle against discrimination was waged, mainly, through letters and petitions signed by well-known Abkhazian intellectuals and sent to the CC CPSU and the Supreme Soviet of the USSR (Marykhuba 1994a). This movement was begun by G. A. Dzidzariia, B. V. Shinkuba and K. S. Shakryl who, already in 1947 had expressed their indignation over the ethnocide carried out by the Georgian authorities (Marykhuba 1994a: 81-86; Sagaria 1990)¹⁴).

In May 1954, they were joined by the prominent Abkhazian poet and political activist, Dmitry Gulia, who drew the central authorities' attention to the persecutions of the Abkhazian culture and language, and once again raised the issue of the incorporation of Abkhazia into the Russian Federation (Marykhuba 1994a: 110-113). In the 1960s – 1980s, this sort of letter writing turned into a sort of mass activity. Letters were read at crowded meetings and signatures of support were collected. In those days, the Georgian historical or philological publications were treated by the Abkhazians as being anti-Abkhazian, and served as excuses for manifestations of the people's will. In this climate, scholarly problems became of extraordinary importance to the general public. In the words of a contemporary Abkhazian researcher, the "long Georgian pressure on Abkhazia produced an environment under which Abkhazian studies enjoyed great political importance" (Dzapshba 1996: 69).

In the 1950s, all Abkhazia was incited by Pavle Ingoroqva's book, and Abkhazian scholars did their best to convict him of distorting historical facts. Public indignation was so high that both the Abkhazian and Georgian Party authorities had to adopt special resolutions condemning the book (Lakoba 1990a: 97-98; Dzapshba 1996: 79; Lezhava 1997: 174-183). In 1965, the Abkhazian public came out against a book published by the director of the Abkhazian Research Institute, the philologist Kh. S. Bgaghba, who demonstrated that Abkhazian was greatly affected by Georgian (Bgaghba 1964). Being very familiar with the recent policy of Georgianization, the Abkhazians saw this publication as a new attempt to view them as an integral part of the Georgian nation. In response, a crowded meeting was held in Sukhumi, which called for radical changes in the employment policy in Abkhazia that discriminated against Abkhazians. This criticism was aimed, in particular, at the First Secretary of the Abkhazian Regional Branch of the CPG, M. G. Bgaghba, the brother of the aforementioned scholar (Marykhuba 1994a: 138-150). A protocol of the meeting with numerous signatures was sent to the CC CPSU. The result was that many of those having signed it incurred administrative or Party penalties. This did not discourage the Abkhazians, though,

and very soon, a new reason arose for them to claim their human rights. The third volume of the collected works of the well-known Georgian historian, the Academician N. Berdzenishvili, had come out in 1967, which represented the Georgians as the direct descendants of the early indigenous population of Abkhazia. Protests against this new falsification of history turned into bitter criticism of the policies of the Georgian authorities. At that time, the Abkhazians escaped repression only by a miracle (Marykhuba 1994a: 159-163; Dzapshba 1996: 79-80).

The next campaign was launched in 1977-1978, on the occasion of the adoption of the new Constitution of the USSR and the Constitution of the Georgian SSR. The new Georgian Constitution granted the Georgian language state status within the territory of the republic. The Georgians introduced this point deliberately, because of fear of Russification. Yet, what seemed a natural protective response from the Georgians proved unacceptable in the Abkhazian view. Indeed, the Abkhazians had been for a long time quite accustomed to having Russian as a second native tongue. They used Mingrelian as a third language, in order to communicate with the neighboring Mingrelians. The introduction of one more language poorly fit the existing socio-linguistic situation. It was perceived by the Abkhazians not only as an unnecessary burden but also as a direct threat to their own language. That is why they were unwilling to re-learn in the Georgian way (Hewitt 1996: 203). Initially, Abkhazian scholars protested the distortions of the history of the Abkhazian people made by Georgian scholars. This was followed by a letter by 130 well known Abkhazian intellectuals complaining about discrimination against the Abkhazian people and the de facto violation of Abkhazian autonomy by Georgian authorities. The letter was put together by a group of Abkhazian scholars, including I. R. Markholia, A. A. Anshba, O. N. Damenia, R. K. Chanba, and V. L. Tsvinaria, among others. The authors were alarmed about the coming Georgianization and called for Abkhazia to be withdrawn from the Georgian SSR (Obrashchenie 1977; Marykhuba 1994a: 164-187; Lakoba 1998b: 97-98). The Abkhazians sent letters with similar content in the early 1980s, as well.

This matter was not limited to the activities of only a few intellectuals. Persecutions of their authors in 1978 caused a wave of protest throughout Abkhazia; whole villages took part in a campaign that embraced thousands of people, including even some members of the Abkhazian government. Gradually, the campaign began to take an anti-Georgian stance. No other republic of the USSR witnessed such mass protest movements, including long-term strikes by workers and clerks during that period (September 1978). The authorities were seriously alarmed, and many replacements were made among both Soviet and Party officials in Abkhazia and Georgia. In June 1978, the First Secretary of the CC CPG, E. A. Shevardnadze (who occupied this position from 1972 to 1985) gave a speech at the Meeting of the CC CPG, in which he recognized the fact of anti-Abkhazian discrimination by Georgian authorities. After that, the Abkhazians received some privileges; in particular, Abkhazian State University was established in Sukhumi, on

the foundation of the former Pedagogical Institute. It became an important Abkhazian national symbol. Yet, the general attitude of Georgian authorities towards the Abkhazians did not change much. When the new Constitution of Abkhazia was adopted in 1978, the building where it was signed, the Abkhazian Branch of the CPG, had to be surrounded by the military against possible public protest (Dzaphsba 1996: 72-75, 80-81; Slider 1985: 59-64; Hewitt 1993: 282; Lakoba 1998b: 98).

The Abkhazian protest campaigns brought about some benefits. In the 1950s – 1980s, the situation was gradually improving but the changes were fairly contradictory. For example, Abkhazians accounted for only 17 percent of the population of the Abkhazian ASSR in the 1950s – 1970s. Yet, Abkhazians accounted for 37 to 45 percent of the secretaries of the Party organizations at various levels. At the same time, their share of the overall Party membership fluctuated between 13 and 19 percent, whereas Georgians accounted for more than 50 percent of Party members in Abkhazia. As a result, Abkhazians were often Party bosses over Georgians.

Russian was the second language in Abkhazia for both the Abkhazians and Georgians, while it was more popular among the former than among the latter (75 and 56 percent respectively, in 1979). This meant that only a few Abkhazians were able to receive higher education in Tbilisi, where Georgian was the language of instruction in school. That is why, before the Sukhumi Pedagogical Institute was reorganized to become Abkhazian State University (ASU), many Abkhazians tried very hard to receive a higher education in the Russian Federation, and that was not an easy task for them. In fact, there were ten times as many Abkhazian university students after the establishment of the ASU.

In any case, the Abkhazians enjoyed lower standards of education than the Georgians did, and this factor limited their access to prestigious positions. Furthermore, Abkhazia served as a recreational area; it was not developed for industry, and rural inhabitants made up the great bulk of its population. Abkhazia received financial resources through Tbilisi rather than directly from Moscow, and decisions made in Tbilisi were rarely favorable to Abkhazia. In terms of capital investments per person, Abkhazia was far behind other regions of Georgia, and its enterprises used equipment that was not updated for years. Thus, both labor productivity and people's incomes were much lower there than in the rest of Georgia (Slider 1985: 53-59).

The measures taken in 1978 were unable to ease Georgian-Abkhazian tensions in any significant way. The most important power positions were distributed among the Abkhazians and Georgians in Abkhazia in the very late 1980s in the following way. There were 55 Abkhazians and 56 Georgians in the Supreme Soviet of the Republic, and Georgians even predominated in the local Soviets – 47 percent Georgians versus 26 percent Abkhazians. The key positions in the Soviet of Ministers of Abkhazia were occupied by 16 Abkhazians and 24 Georgians. At the same time, there were 191 Abkhazians and 322 Georgians who were managers in

industry, transport, construction, and agriculture (V krivom zerkale 1989)¹⁵). Thus, although the share of Abkhazians among the Republic's leaders was somewhat lower than the share of the Georgians, it was much higher than their representation among the Republic's overall population. That was why the Georgians constantly complained of Abkhazian domination in Soviet and Party bureaucratic bodies (for example, see Nodia 1998: 23). The Abkhazians responded that all the appointments to higher positions were made in Tbilisi, where they selected loyal officials and kept them under permanent control. Moreover, when A. Sakvarelidze was the Second Secretary of the Abkhazian Regional Branch of the CPG and later the Chairman of the Soviet of Ministers of Abkhazia, the Abkhazians had almost no access to decision-making when key issues were discussed, and their views were often ignored altogether (Marshania 1995: 198).

The Abkhazians complained of that real economic power in Abkhazia was held by the Georgians, who dominated over the other directors of various enterprises. Georgians made up the bulk of the ASU faculty (up to 70 percent) and they enjoyed equal shares with the Abkhazians among its managers. Yet, the Georgians used to disseminate rumors that the Abkhazians had taken all the key positions at ASU. True, in practical terms it was easier for Abkhazian then for the Georgian youngsters to enter the University. Georgians predominated in the staff of the Republic's hospital. After all, many levers of control were operated from Tbilisi. For example, the Abkhazian newspaper, "Bzyb", received its paper from there, and in 1989, when the Georgian authorities got angry with items it published, they sharply reduced the paper supply. Whereas the establishment of the ASU was seen positively by the Abkhazians, they were greatly alarmed with the development of the Institute of Sub-tropical Plants in Sukhumi, where Georgians made up the main body of the students (up to 90 percent) as well as the faculty. This Institute was one of the factors in the development of well-trained Georgians in Abkhazia, who proved to be strong competitors with the Abkhazians (Shnirelman 1989a. Also see V krivom zerkale 1989; Kvarchia 1989).

At the same time, the Georgians used to refer to the ingratitude of the Abkhazian who, while having a population of less than 100 thousand people, enjoyed their own University, a TV program, belle-lettres published in numerous copies and disproportionally high representation in the structures of power (for example, see Amiredzibi 1992; Totadze 1994: 24-25). Yet, as G. Hewitt had already noted, the Abkhazian sections of the ASU was smaller and weaker than the Russian and the Georgian ones; Abkhazian TV programs were at first broadcast for only half an hour twice a week, and only in 1989 were they extended to three hours, though late at night (Hewitt 1993: 285).

By the end of the 1980s, the situation had become dramatic. Georgian nationalists became increasingly more active and openly manifested their desire to break away from the USSR and build an independent democratic Georgian state. At the same time, while recalling the violations of minority rights in the Democratic Georgia of 1918-1921, and responding negatively to the chauvinist slogans of some

informal Georgian movements, the Abkhazians insisted with more persistence on the return of Abkhazia to the status of a sovereign republic, and emphasized the impossibility of continued inclusion of Abkhazia within Georgia. The Abkhazians addressed all these arguments at the 19th All-Union Conference of the CPSU, in a letter sent in June 1988 and signed by 60 well known Abkhazian scholars and cultural activists. The first version of this letter was written by the head of the Department of Pre-Revolutionary History of the Abkhazian State Museum, I. R. Markholia, and a researcher at the Institute of History of the USSR from the USSR Academy of Sciences, G. N. Trapeznikov. It addressed the same issues as were expressed in the appeal by Abkhazian intellectuals to the Soviet leaders in 1977 (Marykhuba 1994a: 164-187). A final version of the new appeal was completed by the scientific secretary of the Abkhazian State Museum, A. N. Abregov, and it was edited by the Abkhazian specialist in law, T. M. Shamba (Prilozhenie 1989. Also see Marykhuba 1994a: 383-439).

On March 18, 1989, this famous "Abkhazian letter" received public support at a crowded meeting in the village of Lykhny. Its core issue was the demand to give back Abkhazian political status, that had been approved by the Abkhazian people in March 1921. This letter of appeal was signed by 32 thousand adult citizens of the Republic, including 5 thousand Russians, Armenians, Greeks, Georgians and others (Ardzinba 1989). Bearing in mind that the Abkhazians accounted for slightly more than 93 thousand people in Abkhazia at that time, one can conclude that the letter was signed by almost all the adult Abkhazians. The very place of the meeting was of high significance for the Abkhazians. The country estate of the Shervashidze princely family, where key decisions in Abkhazian history had historically been made, was located there. Thus, the legitimacy of the decision was hardly questioned by any Abkhazian (Marykhuba 1994b: 12-13; Dzapshba 1996: 75-76, 81-82).

Meanwhile, nobody was eager to share the Abkhazians' alarm, let alone meet their demands. These were all unacceptable to Georgia, both to the Communists and, even more so, to informal political groups. The Federal Center was much too involved in internal confrontation within the power structure, between reformers and conservatives, and was unable to cope with the overall growth of tensions in the country. That was why all efforts were made to avoid an open conflict with Georgia. As concerned those international organizations, whose intervention would have been appreciated by the Abkhazians, they were enchanted with Gorbachev's reform activities, and were expecting only positive results from them. They avoided taking any measures that might damage his reputation. As a result, the Abkhazians had to withstand alone the growing wave of Georgian chauvinism which had especially flourished under President Gamsakhurdia, who had come to power in the fall of 1990. This was preceded by the tragic events of 1989 (the Abkhazian-Georgian clashes in connections with the establishment of the Tbilisi University Branch in Sukhumi, and then, the two-day war of June 15-16, 1989) that were followed by the Georgian-Abkhazian War of 1992-1993 and the final breakup when Georgian-Abkhazian relationships led to a deadlock.

The shortsighted policies of both the Georgian informal organizations and Gamsakhurdia's government were by no means aimed at the Abkhazians alone. Simultaneously, tensions were growing with Armenian and Azeri minorities at the Georgian southern and eastern borders, respectively. The Ajars were worried in the southwest, and South Ossetians in the north. They were especially alarmed after Gamsakhurdia's government, anxious about the "purity of the nation", managed to resettle four thousand Daghestanis out of Georgia (for that, see Hewitt 1993: 287; Otyrba 1994: 291), and the Georgian media began to disseminate calls for the abolition of Ajar autonomy (for example, see Dzhakhaia 1990).

In the meantime, the Abkhazian parliament passed the Declaration of the State Sovereignty of Abkhazia on August 25, 1990, which met a negative response from Tbilisi. In 1992, Georgia denounced the Constitution of the Georgian SSR of 1978 and returned to the Constitution of the Democratic Republic of Georgia of February 1921, which contained no articles on autonomy for anyone. Initially, Abkhazia only aspired to restore Treaty Republic status, which it had enjoyed in 1925. Negotiations for that were carried out with Georgia in August 1992. That was broken up by the entrance of Georgian troops into Abkhazia. After that, the latter declared itself free of any obligations towards Georgia and brought into force an article of the Constitution of the SSR Abkhazia of 1925, which spoke of the right for separation and free self-determination. This was how Abkhazia came to declare its total state independence. This was finally approved by the new Constitution, adopted by the Supreme Soviet of Abkhazia on November 26, 1994 (Dzapshba 1996: 47, 52-57; Hewitt 1993: 291; Otyrba 1994: 286-288; Lakoba 2001ab). Abkhazian leaders many times manifested their aspiration, first, to retain the multi-ethnic composition of the Republic's population, and second, to be part of a more inclusive political federation (Shamba 1990; Lakoba 1995: 103-104). In fact, Abkhazia had never planned to be totally independent; what the Abkhazians really wanted was that their rights as a distinct people with their own language and culture be respected (for that, see Hewitt 1996: 196).

Vladislav Ardzinba was elected the first president of the independent (albeit unrecognized) Republic of Abkhazia in 1994. New presidential elections and a referendum on the future status of the Republic were held on October 3, 1999. Eighty-seven percent of the registered citizens took part in them, and 99 percent of them voted for Ardzinba to be president for the next term, and 97 percent manifested their willingness to live in a sovereign republic (Globachev 1999).

CHAPTER 2

THE ABKHAZIAN REPUBLIC IN SEARCH OF ITS GLORIOUS ANCESTORS

The great political importance of early history and ethnography clearly expressed itself during the period of the Democratic Republic of Georgia and the civil war in Russia. Both the Russian and Georgian authorities and politicians referred to history and ethnography, in order to legitimize their claims to the ownership of Abkhazia. For example, a representative of the Kuban' government, N. Vorobiev, maintained that the Abkhazians were by no means related to the Georgians, that they had been known on the Black Sea littoral since early medieval times, that they enjoyed their own state before being incorporated into Georgia, that their stay within the Georgian state was fairly brief, that Abkhazia had developed independently from Georgia from the late 15th century, and that the Abkhazians accounted for more than 50 percent of its population as late as 1917 (Vorobiev 1990).

On their side, Georgian authorities also tried to benefit from early history, in order to prove their claims for the northwestern Caucasian territories as far as Tuapse. They recruited the major Georgian historian, Ivane Dzhavakhishvili, who argued that the Abkhazians and the Georgians were closely related people, that Abkhazia had always been a part of Georgia, and that the borders of Abkhazia, and, thus, of Georgia once reached the mouth of the Kuban' River and the city of Tuapse. Pressed by the Georgians, the APS's representatives had to sign a document that told of Abkhazian historical rights to the Black Sea littoral as far as Tuapse. On May 1, 1919, the Georgian delegate made a statement at the Paris peace conference that Sochi was a Georgian city, and the entire eastern Black Sea region was a genuine Georgian territory (Basaria 1923: 92; Menteshashvili 1990: 35-36; Hewitt 1993: 279; Marykhuba 1994b: 25-26).

Meanwhile, Abkhazian intellectuals were also addressing the remote past of their own people and they attempted to decorate it with glorious deeds performed by their ancestors. They needed this past glory especially at the turn of the 20th century after Abkhazia had lost its name and its ethnic composition had rapidly changed to the disfavor of the Abkhazians. Abkhazian enlighteners did their best to arrest the process of erosion of the Abkhazian culture and to awaken self-awareness among the Abkhazians. The future Abkhazian poet, Dmitry Gulia, was one of those who began a literary tradition in Abkhazian¹⁶.

Dmitry Gulia (1874-1960) was born to an Abkhazian peasant family in the village of Uarcha in the Lower Kodor River Valley. His childhood was closely linked with one of the most tragic events of Abkhazian history, the Makhadzhirstvo, when hundreds of thousands of Caucasian highlanders were forced out of their lands by the Russian authorities and had to search for refuge in Turkey and in other regions of the Near East. Dmitry's father, Joseph Gulia, was one of those who finally came back after suffering severe adversities during his period of exile.

Dmitry studied first with the local priest and then at a unique two-year primary school in Sukhum, intended for Caucasian highlanders. After that, he attended a teachers' seminary in Gori for four months. At that time, he was strongly affected by the school supervisor, K. D. Machavariani, who aroused his interest in philology, folklore and the history of Abkhazia. In his teens, Dmitry was already fluent in Russian and Georgian, and he knew the Abkhazian epic, the tales of the Narts, introduced to him by his father. From his youth, Gulia contributed to Abkhazian public education, which became his life's work. Machavariani involved him in a project focused on the improvement of the Abkhazian alphabet. The latter was invented by the gifted linguist, Major-General P. K. Uslar, in 1862; another version of the alphabet was suggested by a commission headed by General I. A. Bartolomei, which became the basis of the first Abkhazian primer, published in 1865. Machavariani and Gulia finally completed this task and published an Abkhazian primer in Tbilisi in 1892. This book turned out to be the first one used for Abkhazian education in the native language (Bgazhba 1967: 41-52). Dmitry Gulia was one of the first rural teachers to occupy himself with this task since the 1890s. In 1918, he began to publish his own verses in Abkhazian and, in fact, became one of the founders of Abkhazian belle-lettres (Gulia 1925: 20-21; Delba 1937; Gulia 1962: 19-20, 31, 44, 47, 112 ff.; Bgazhba, Zelinsky 1965: 67 ff.).

In the 1920s, Gulia was a great figure among the few Abkhazian intellectuals, and he was even a member of the Abkhazian government in 1921. In 1925, he published a book entitled "The History of Abkhazia" that played an important role in shaping Abkhazian national self-awareness. In 1928 – 1929, he was the director of the Academy of Abkhazian Language and Literature founded in 1925 through the initiative of the Academician N. Ya. Marr. Then, having been heavily attacked by his critics, Gulia has lost his former position and for the rest of his life worked as a researcher at the Academy, which in 1931 was reorganized into the Abkhazian Institute of Language, Literature and History of the Georgian branch of the USSR Academy of Sciences. There he focused mainly on Abkhazian language, folklore and literature. He was awarded the honorary title of People's Poet of Abkhazia by the Abkhazian government, on January 1, 1937, and was a deputy of the Supreme Soviet of the Abkhazian ASSR in 1938.

In 1937-1938, under heavy pressure from Tbilisi, Gulia had to take part in the elaboration of the new Abkhazian alphabet, this time based on the Georgian script. Simultaneously, he was compiling a textbook in Georgian for the Abkhazian schools (Sagaria 1990)¹⁷. All this activity hardly provided him with moral

satisfaction. He was so shocked by the closing of the Abkhazian schools in 1946 that he became quite ill. Yet, this did not save him from bitter criticism, caused by the new campaign against his "The History of Abkhazia" (Gulia 1962: 219-220) that will be discussed further on. In May 1954, Gulia sent a letter to Khrushchev about the persecutions of Abkhazian culture and education, and requested Abkhazia to be transferred to the Russian Federation (Marykhuba 1994a: 110-111; Dzapshba 1996: 72). Remaining alive by a miracle through the time of Stalin's repressions (the authorities did not dare to arrest the only People's poet of Abkhazia), Dmitry Gulia was devoted to the Abkhazian culture throughout his long life and did a lot for its development. He was twice (in 1954 and 1958) elected deputy of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, and they reckoned with him in Abkhazia.

As was noted, he was interested in the remote history of Abkhazia from his early days and collected various bits of highly fragmentary evidence in order to answer questions that had tormented the Abkhazian intellectuals for so long. Who were the Abkhazians, where did they come from before they arrived in the Caucasus, who were their distant ancestors and, finally, what was the reason for their miserable fate at the turn of the 20th century (for that, see Marr 1926: 134)? All these questions were inspired by discussions with Machavariani, who acquainted Gulia with his own excerpts of the manuscripts of early and medieval authors. Gulia was especially fond of Herodotus, who depicted the glorious past of the Colchians and traced them to Egypt. Shortly before World War I, Gulia became acquainted with N. Ya. Marr, who encouraged Gulia's research along these lines. At that time, Marr argued that in their language and culture the Abkhazians were closely connected with the Near Eastern region, which was where one should look for their roots (Marr 1916. For that, see Gulia 1962: 31, 64, 99-100).

Gulia's attraction to early history was far from a purely academic interest; he sincerely believed that, in order to enjoy self-awareness, people had to have their own distinct history. That is why he viewed his own writing on Abkhazian history as a very patriotic act, and occupied himself with it in the 1910s to early 1920s, albeit by fits and starts. Although Gulia had written many works during his life, "The History of Abkhazia" was his favorite, according to his son's account (Gulia 1962: 100, 122, 158-160). In fact, as another outstanding Abkhazian scholar, Sh. D. Inal-Ipa, pointed out, this book was the "first audacious attempt to give meaning to the early and medieval history of Abkhazia" (Inal-Ipa 1974: 54)¹⁸. This was recognized by even the most severe critics of "The History of Abkhazia" (Agrba, Khashba 1934: 17; Delba 1937: 42-43).

While excusing his own sincere interest in the subject, Gulia emphasized that the numerically small Abkhazian people of the present day, albeit having enjoyed a great past, had not mastered it, because their complete history was still unwritten, and the fragmentary data provided by the early authors had never been collected and systematized (Gulia 1925: 7-9). What were the main ideas of "The History of Abkhazia"? It contained several crucial points, some of which were appreciated by the Soviet historical tradition, others were flatly repudiated, still others were a

matter of discourse between Abkhazian and Georgian scholars. First, Gulia identified the Abkhazian ancestors with the Heniokhoi, who were located on the eastern Black Sea coast by classical authors. Second, he identified the Heniokhoi with the Colchians and brought them out of Egypt, and more precisely, out of Ethiopia. Third, he viewed the Abkhazians as the closest relatives of the medieval Zighi and their descendants, the Adyghes of the northwestern Caucasus. Fourth, he mentioned that they were related to the Georgian tribes as well (Svans, Laz, Kartvelians, and others). Following Marr, Gulia included the North Caucasian languages (and Abkhazian as one of them) in the Yaphetic family of languages, and pointed out their direct connection with Urartian (Van) cuneiform inscriptions. He found a Yaphetic sub-stratum in Armenian, and depicted mass Yaphetic migrations north to the Caucasus, where the newcomers merged with the local inhabitants.

Moreover, he related the arrival of the Colchians to all these processes in the eastern Black Sea region and argued that, contrary to what the Georgian historians were saying, they must be identified with the Abkhazians-Adyghes rather than with the Mingrelian-Laz. Like many of his contemporaries, Gulia was fascinated by the incredible discoveries in the field of Hittite studies and believed that the Hittites would have played an outstanding role in all the processes in question. While referring to the fragmentary but impressive archaeological data, he assumed that a brilliant Bronze Age culture had probably been brought to the Caucasus from the south with tribes who were relatives of the Hittites (Gulia 1925: 89-91). Gulia went so far as to suppose that the Hittites founded Sukhum, and that it was one of the earliest cities in the Caucasus (Gulia 1925: 146-147).

Having identified the classical Heniokhoi with the Colchians, Gulia settled them throughout the vast territory that embraced not only historical Colchis, which, in his representation, covered territories of contemporary Abkhazia, Mingrelia, Imereti, Svaneti, Guria and Lazistan, but even Armenia as far as sources of the Euphrates (evidently, Gulia followed Marr and some other contemporary authors). Struck by the tribal name replacements in the east Black Sea region in the end of the 1st Millennium B.C. to the very early 1st Millennium A.D., Gulia interpreted this development with reference to changes in the military-political importance of various local tribes and the different degree of acquaintance of different classical authors with local population, rather than to any radical population shift. For example, local tribes were recorded by different Greek and Roman authors as either Colchians, or Heniokhoi, or Abasgoi, or Apsilae (Gulia 1925: 36, 41-52, 71, 76, 80-81). Following Marr, Gulia included the Moschi in the Colchian tribes (Gulia 1925: 82), thus bringing the Abkhazians into the long dispute between Armenian and Georgian scholars, focused on the ethnic identity of the early Moschi.

Moreover, Gulia noted that place names and river names of evidently Abkhazian-Adyghes origin were known in the territory of Georgia, including its eastern part (Gulia 1925: 62-64). The shrinking of this vast territory and the decline of the Abkhazian-Adyghes population was the result of extensive Georgiantization in medieval times, Gulia maintained (Gulia 1925: 71). Yet, this had occurred later, he

argued, and initially the Abkhazians were civilizers. While living close to the seacoast and being in lively contact with the classical Greeks, they spread the fruits of civilization among all neighbors in the north, northwest and east. This lasted until the 10th century, when this process involved the Georgians (Gulia 1925: 143).

Finally, Gulia ascribed the emergence and development of the Abkhazian Kingdom between the very end of the 8th and the end of the 10th centuries to the local Abkhazian Dynasty, and claimed that once the Abkhazian Kings had governed certain Georgian rulers and even affected Armenia (Gulia 1925: 192-222).

Apparently, "The History of Abkhazia" touched nerves of Georgian historians and challenged them. Yet, it fortunately avoided severe criticism in Georgia in the climate of ideological pluralism of the 1920s; all the problems were still ahead. In the meantime, in 1929, Gulia was even awarded the Georgian Republic's Order of the Hero of Labor, and was elected a member of the Georgian Historical-Ethnographic Society.

On the other hand, the attitude towards Gulia's book in Abkhazia was unexpectedly fairly ambivalent. The weakest point of "The History of Abkhazia" dealt with Gulia's favorite idea about the arrival of the Abkhazian-Adygehe ancestors from Egypt and Abyssinia. It is worth noting that this was based not only on Herodotus' assumptions¹⁹), but on folk stories still popular among the north Caucasian peoples (for that see, for example, Marr 1926: 134; Inal-Ipa 1965: 104-106, 1976: 162-163). These stories affect certain local versions of ethnogenesis even nowadays. Moreover, in the views of contemporary specialists, there is a grain of truth there, since newcomers from the Mediterranean region took part in the ethnogenesis of local populations (Kaukhchishvili 1979: 116). Meanwhile, a relationship with Africans was outside the plans of Sukhum authorities. This was fairly emotionally articulated by N. Lakoba, who stated, "Let Gulia himself be three times an Ethiopian!" but the Abkhazians would manage without. That was why the Abkhazian authorities were by no means fascinated with the book. Although "The History of Abkhazia" had been completed by the end of 1922, and the author generously presented its ideas to the general public, from school teachers to Soviet and Party elite (Gulia 1925: 11), he had to publish it not in Sukhumi but in Tbilisi, where he was invited by I. A. Dzhavakhishvili to give a lecture course on Abkhazian in 1924-1925 (Gulia 1962: 158-160, 164; Inal-Ipa 1974: 28).

At the same time, this does not mean that all his ideas were unacceptable to the Abkhazian authorities or the patriots of those times. The pages that displayed the political and cultural achievements of the Abkhazian ancestors in Abkhazia itself and glorified their outstanding role in Caucasian history were appreciated. The Abkhazian Narkompros (Ministry of Education) was eager to publish this sort of book in Sukhumi. Abkhazian intellectuals were driven by the same aspirations as Gulia was, but they articulated them in a harsher and naked manner. They were highly dissatisfied with the great obscurity of Abkhazian history, and they used to chalk that up to the chauvinism of the Georgian, Armenian and Russian historians, who did not care about the destiny of the numerically small Abkhazian people

(Ashkhatsava 1925: 5-6). Actually, this attitude had been advocated by N. Ya. Marr for years (Marr 1916).

Thus, while the Gulia's volume was coming out in Tbilisi, a pamphlet was being published in Sukhumi, written by another well-known activist of the Abkhazian nationalist movement, S. M. Ashkhatsava²⁰). In fact, this was an extended version of a paper of his written at the request of the Abkhazian Scientific Society and delivered at the First Congress of the Activists for the Local Study of the Black Sea Littoral and Western Caucasus, held in Sukhum in September 1924.

The following points were of crucial importance to Ashkhatsava, who had placed special emphasis on them in his pamphlet. First, he related the earliest Transcaucasian civilization to the activity of one and the same group of people, who were the progenitors of the Nairi, or Urartians, and the founders of the earliest state there. In their culture, they were part of the "Assyrian-Babylonian world", and strongly influenced the northern regions up to the Upper Volga River. While claiming that, Ashkhatsava bore in mind (apparently, following Marr) that the Urartians were close relatives of the Abkhazians. Second, although the Armenians and the Kartvelians (Georgians) had come onto the historical scene after the decline of Urartu, they took back seats in the historical theatre until the Abkhazians had begun to build a powerful state. He maintained that this development had commenced very nearly the beginning of the Christian era, and that even Byzantium had had to reckon with the Abkhazians. Third, the Abkhazian kings decided to unite all the Kartvelian tribes for the sake of their own power, rather than in order to build up some "Georgian state". That was why it made no sense to talk of any peaceful unification; instead, new territories had been annexed through merciless military actions. Thus, the Abkhazian Kingdom consolidated its power and expanded its borders, until it had incorporated all the Georgian lands. Ashkhatsava further argued that as late as the very end of the 15th century, it was still the Abkhazian Kingdom, and its kings, including David the Builder and Queen Tamar, were the Abkhazian kings. Fourth, the idea of a new unification of lands, this time within the Georgian state, turned out to be a comparatively recent development, dating to the 16th – 17th centuries. At that time, Georgian patriotism made them radically rewrite history, and the unpleasant passages dealing with Abkhazian glory were harshly eliminated. Fifth, it seemed very important to Ashkhatsava to emphasize Abkhazian-Adyghe unity, and he remarked that both the Abkhazians and the Circassians had actually been the same people in the remote past, and that they were baptized together. Finally, Ashkhatsava argued that Christianity had already become widespread among the Abkhazians during the first centuries A.D., and they had their own bishop in the 3rd century A.D. Thus, he represented the Abkhazians as among the earliest Christians and hinted that the Abkhazian Church had been founded by St. Andrew himself²¹).

While accusing Georgian historians of a tendentious approach, Ashkhatsava believed that, all the same, traces of former Abkhazian glory must remain intact somewhere. True, the old manuscripts could have been destroyed and rewritten; yet,

there should be other sources, for example, archaeological materials. Indeed, in the early 20th century, archaeology had already proved to be a promising means of revitalizing forgotten early civilizations. Ashkhatsava also put his trust in early inscriptions, old coins, place names, linguistic data, and the like. In his enthusiasm, he sometimes went too far and made rather implausible assumptions. For example, he refused to acknowledge any links between the early and contemporary Georgian languages, and maintained without any reserve that the “old Georgian alphabet” had been invented by the Abkhazians and served for both the Abkhazian spoken and state languages. That was why he identified the medieval inscriptions glorifying the “Abkhazian Kings” as Abkhazian inscriptions, and there was no question for him of their language. He related the earliest coins in the east Black Sea region (“*colchidki*”) to the activities of the Abkhazian Dynasty. While mentioning Abkhazian place names in Georgia, he called the Moschi “Abkhazian ancestors”, which approach was shared by Gulia as well. Finally, referring to Marr, he argued that, according to linguistic data, Abkhazian strongly influenced Georgian, rather than vice-versa (Ashkhatsava 1925)²².

Having finished with the Georgian historical tradition, Ashkhatsava began the history of Abkhazia in the 11th century B.C., and called the period between the 8th and 15th centuries the “Abkhazian Epoch”. After that, the Abkhazian “Golden Age” was over, and a bad period began. Ashkhatsava chose to avoid going deeper into these later times. In this way, he pre-determined the line of the succeeding Abkhazian historical tradition, which focused on the search for the lost “Golden Age” and paid less attention to the period of the 15th – 18th centuries.

The same features of the Abkhazian historical tradition of the 1920s expressed themselves in a popular overview by S. P. Basaria that dealt with Abkhazian economic geography and ethnography. History was underrepresented in his book, and it seems important to analyze which particular historical facts he found worth mentioning. He identified the Abkhazians with the classical Heniokhoi tribe, and argued that they settled in Colchis as early as several centuries before the Christian Era, and dated the emergence of Sukhum to the time of Ramses II. Further on, Basaria pointed out proudly that, in contrast to Georgia, Abkhazia never lost its independence. Neither the Romans, nor the Byzantines, nor Genoan traders, nor the Turks were able to subjugate it. Retorting to certain Georgian authors, Basaria maintained that the Mingrelians, rather than the Abkhazians, were newcomers in this territory, and that the Abkhazians had not pushed the Mingrelians to the south, but, on the contrary, the Mingrelians had been expanding northwards and assimilated the Abkhazians. He was indignant about attempts to impose Christianity or Islam forcibly on the Abkhazians, and he argued that the Abkhazians enjoyed their own genuine monotheist tradition (Basaria 1923: 38, 43, 49-50, 57-58, 137-138).

To put it other way, after Abkhazia was granted relative sovereignty, Abkhazian intellectuals began to elaborate their own views of early history, where an honorable place was secured for their Abkhazian ancestors. First, the Abkhazians

were represented as the true indigenous people in the territory of Abkhazia. Even if their remote ancestors had arrived from elsewhere, this had occurred so early that the Abkhazians were still able to claim the status of first settlers with respect to their neighbors, including the Georgians above all. Second, the idea of early migration from the south was closely linked with the aspiration to relate the Abkhazian ancestors to the earliest civilizations of the Near East and to provide them the honorable status of civilizers. Third, it was assumed that the Abkhazian ancestors occupied much larger territories in the distant past and that their ethnic territory had shrunk over time. Fourth, the Abkhazian ancestors were represented as the bearers of a higher culture, who enlightened the formerly barbarian Caucasus. In particular, some versions depicted them as the earliest Christians in the Caucasus. Finally, the Abkhazians were identified as the founders of one of the earliest states in the Caucasus, who acquainted the Georgians with basic knowledge about political organization.

This version of the past had to convince both the Abkhazians themselves and the outside world that their claims to cultural authenticity and their own sovereign state were well grounded. Indeed, all of this was based on the supposedly undoubted historical merits of their remote ancestors. Simultaneously, this view clearly demonstrated competition between the Abkhazians and the Georgians; as we will see later on, that was a struggle for the same historical resources, and both sides tried to mobilize very similar cultural-historical arguments. The defeat of the Democratic Republic of Georgia and the loss of independence by Georgia on the one hand, and the appropriation of political status by the Abkhazians to the extent that they formed their own republic on the other hand, resulted in the Abkhazians feeling superior to the Georgians. It seemed to take a long time for Georgian intellectuals to recover from the psychological shocks of the forcible annexation of Georgia by Soviet Russia, the suppression of the large-scale anti-Soviet uprising of 1924, and the anti-religious campaign of the early 1920s, that dealt a heavy blow to the Georgian Church and destroyed many outstanding historical monuments. All of this opened the way for the Abkhazians to develop their own view of history in the early 1920s, which let them winning at least a symbolic victory over the Georgians. They not only took back their own past but also appropriated part of the Georgian historical heritage. In political terms, this development was based on the sympathy of the early Soviet power towards ethnic minorities, manifested in the 1920s and openly demonstrated by the resolutions of the 12th Congress of the Russian Communist Party (Bolshevik). In ideological terms, this approach was grounded on Marr's theory, in which he did his best to call the attention of the public to the cultures and histories of ethnic minorities.

It is worth noting that the Abkhazian issue was of special interest to Marr, and he returned to the discussion of it many times (Marr 1916, 1926, 1929, 1938). He was indignant about the neglect of the Abkhazians by Georgian and Armenian historians, and he argued that the "history of the Abkhazians was the beginning of the Georgian Bagratids Dynasty" (Marr 1916)²³. Marr's view of the earliest

Abkhazian past was rather inconsistent; it combined brilliant ideas with quite bizarre reasoning. Quite correctly, Marr related the Abkhazian language to North Caucasian ones, revealed a strong North Caucasian substratum in Armenian, and noticed numerous Georgian loan words in Abkhazian that he identified as the result of a relatively recent cultural process. At the same time, he identified the Scythians with the Colchians and localized the early Etruscans in the Volga River Valley. His view of the Abkhazians' arrival in the Caucasus was particularly contradictory. On the one hand, he wrote of the arrival of the Yaphetids (including the Abkhazian ancestors) from the Near East (Marr 1916), and on the other hand, argued that Abkhazian developed in the northern Caucasus (Marr 1926: 154). He assumed that the Abkhazians had already arrived in the eastern Black Sea region in the classical period, pushing the unrelated Colchians southward (Marr 1926: 146-147, 153-154). He was convinced that the Abkhazians occupied a much larger territory in the remote past than they do nowadays, and were superior to the Georgians in socio-political terms. The Abkhazians not only founded their own state but also incorporated the Georgians into it, and they affected the Georgian language. While emphasizing their political dominance, Marr remarked that, up to Queen Tamar's time, the king's title began with the words the "King of the Abkhazians" (Marr 1929).

In brief, this view contained different arguments. Some of them could be used to advantage by the Abkhazians and others by the Georgians, to upgrade their prestige. This is just what has happened. Yet, whereas the Abkhaziocentric view of the remote past met no obstacles in the 1920s, the situation reversed over the next decade. There were two reasons for that – one general, and another one specific to Abkhazia. The former was the "Marxist revolution" in Soviet scholarship, which caused a radical revision of certain approaches popular in the past, such as migrationism (Shnirelman 1995: 125-126, 1996a: 231-232). The latter was the reduction of the political status of Abkhazia, its incorporation into Georgia, albeit as an Autonomous Republic. Indeed, all the Abkhazian historical institutions were now subordinated by Tbilisi Center, which began to implement control over them.

In the early 1930s, Soviet scholars were obliged to struggle against migrationism, nationalism and chauvinism. In Abkhazia, this campaign focused on the writings of Basaria, Ashkhatsava and Gulia, who were accused not only of the methodological errors but, most of all, of their adherence to the "bourgeois theory of migration", local nationalism and even "Abkhazian chauvinism", therefore, of propagandizing "anti-Marxist" and "anti-Communist" ideas. Ashkhatsava was especially severely criticized for exaggerating the historical role of the Abkhazian people and attempting to appropriate the Georgian writing system. Gulia's hypothesis of the Abyssinian roots of the Abkhazians was also rejected. Now, to conform to the Marrist-Marxist historical concept, the Abkhazians had to be undoubtedly of local origin. The "Abkhazian people must have formed through a merger of tribes which, in their turn, had originated in a merger of small ethnic clan and totemic groups that lived in the Caucasus". The authors of this criticism took an

internationalist stance and argued that one should not glorify one people's achievements at the expense of another. They even manifested readiness to throw away the very name, the "Abkhazian Kingdom", for it was an "allied state of Abkhazians, Kartvelians and other tribes" (Agrba, Khashba 1934; Delba 1937: 43-44. For that, see Gulia 1962: 162-165).

In the early 1930s, the authors of "non-Marxist works" were the target of severe criticism by local party cells, and were also attacked by local mass media (Agrba, Khashba 1934: 18. For that, see Gulia 1962: 164-165). Yet they experienced no administrative persecutions. After they had symbolically recognized their errors, they kept working for the benefit of Abkhazia. Retribution came somewhat later, in the very late 1930s – early 1940s, when Basaria and Ashkhatsava, together with their critics, disappeared in the crucible of Stalin's repressions.

For the time being, the matter was settled with a change in paradigm, and the Russian author, A. V. Fadeev, was asked to write a history of Abkhazia. He based his views on the new ethnogenetic concept elaborated by the Academician Marr and extensively introduced by the State Academy of History of Material Culture (Leningrad), the main institution in those days concerned with the prehistoric and early historic past. The ethnic situation of the early Colchis was reconstructed quite differently. There were neither "peoples", nor "states" in the region. Instead, there were small linguistically unrelated groups with unstable membership, and their merger into larger and more stable ethnic entities still lay ahead. Neither the Abkhazians nor the Kartvelians existed by the beginning of the Christian era, let alone distinct languages. Despite that, the classical authors provided all those small groups with distinct names and, quite erroneously, represented them as independent peoples. It was no less erroneous to represent the Colchians as a homogeneous ethnic community, for this inclusive term covered all the different groups who lived in Colchis. Only quite gradually did the unification of separate groups into larger cultural entities develop as was demonstrated by tribal name replacement, i.e. shifts from Heniokhoi to Apsilae and Abasgoi, and from Colchians to Laz (Fadeev 1934: 44-66).

Concerning political development, Fadeev acknowledged that the Georgian ancestors, the Iberians and the Laz, had a certain superiority, as they enjoyed the rule of tribal chiefs already by the beginning of the Christian era. Yet the same occurred among the Apsilae and Abasgoi soon thereafter, and, in Fadeev's view, distinct Abkhazian-Adyghe tribes might have emerged in the first centuries A.D. (Fadeev 1934: 66-68, 75). He depicted the formation of the earliest state in Colchis in the following way. A flourishing of Lazica was observed in the beginning of the medieval period that was based on a powerful tribal alliance, which included both the Georgian ancestors and Abkhazian tribes with their own chiefs. In the 6th – 8th centuries, the southern and eastern regions were weakened and depopulated as the result of a long, exhausting struggle against external enemies – first, the Persians, and then the Arabs. In the 660s, Iberia had fallen and was annexed by the Caliphate,

and its Kartvelian kings had to look for refuge among the Abkhazians. Lazica had also been plundered and fallen into decline. Due to the geographical remoteness of Abkhazia from the main battlefields and because of its rulers' skillful playing upon the tensions between the Caliphate and Byzantium, the Abkhazians not only escaped heavy losses but also retained their political system and rose over neighboring tribes. Their ruler, Leon II, declared himself king, and quite easily subjugated all of western Transcaucasia. In this way a state emerged that was called an "Abkhazian-Kartvelian state" by Fadeev, who was willing to compromise the Abkhazian and the Georgian views of the past (Fadeev 1934: 70-81). It is worth noting in passing that this term could not satisfy the Abkhazian "internationalists" (Agrba, Khashba 1934: 19).

Over the next two centuries, the Abkhazian rulers waged an active offensive policy and proved able to annex not only numerous Kartvelian principalities but also certain neighboring territories. While integrating new lands, they supplemented their titles with related names. Since Abkhazia was their first estate, the king's title traditionally began with this particular name. For example, the unifier of western and eastern Georgia, the first ruler of the unified kingdom, Bagrat III, called himself the "King of the Abkhazians, Kartes, Kakhes, Laks and Armenians", and this tradition survived up to Queen Tamar. Fadeev maintained that the Abkhazians' role was not restricted to their formal place in the title. Abkhazian nobility enjoyed a prestigious position in the united kingdom, although its role was progressively diminishing with the shift of the political center eastward (first to Kutatisi and then to Tiflis). As a result, the Kartvelian language of the dominant majority was adopted as the state language: it was used for bureaucratic business, in the liturgy, and in literature. Thus, the Kartvelization of the state occurred, and Abkhazia was turned into a remote outlying region (Fadeev 1934: 84-89). It is worth mentioning that in developing this viewpoint, Fadeev followed Marr in many respects (cf. Marr 1929).

He did his best to demonstrate that, after Abkhazia lost its former power, it by no means dissolved among the Georgian population. Around 1125, King David the Builder appointed a member of the Shervashidze (Chachba) family a ruler ("*eristav*"). Members of this family became very enterprising, and after Georgia was ruined by the Mongol invasion of 1231-1232, David Shervashidze managed to be granted the hereditary right of power over Abkhazia. In the 14th century, his heirs broke away from Tbilisi *de facto*; and after the final disintegration of the united kingdom in the 15th century, Abkhazian independence was established *de jure* (Fadeev 1934: 89). Thus, Fadeev's concept, albeit more moderate than those of his predecessors of the 1920s, still represented the history of Abkhazia as being isolated from the history of Georgia, and moreover, provided it with a certain superiority in respect to the most crucial period of the emergence of the unified state.

CHAPTER 3

THE ADVENTURES OF THE EARLY GEORGIANS IN ASIA MINOR

Having been defeated by the Bolsheviks, Democratic Georgia had to set aside its historical ambitions. The Georgians were well aware of their great medieval history, but it was not appropriate to talk about that in the epoch of internationalism. Georgia was represented to the Soviet public of the 1920s as, although the “early hearth of the human culture”, a miserable country that was suffering permanently from its intermediate position between East and West. It was always being conquered by some enemies. Against this background, the Georgian medieval state of David the Builder and Queen Tamar looked like a minor unimportant entity (Bialetsky et al. 1929c: 9-10).

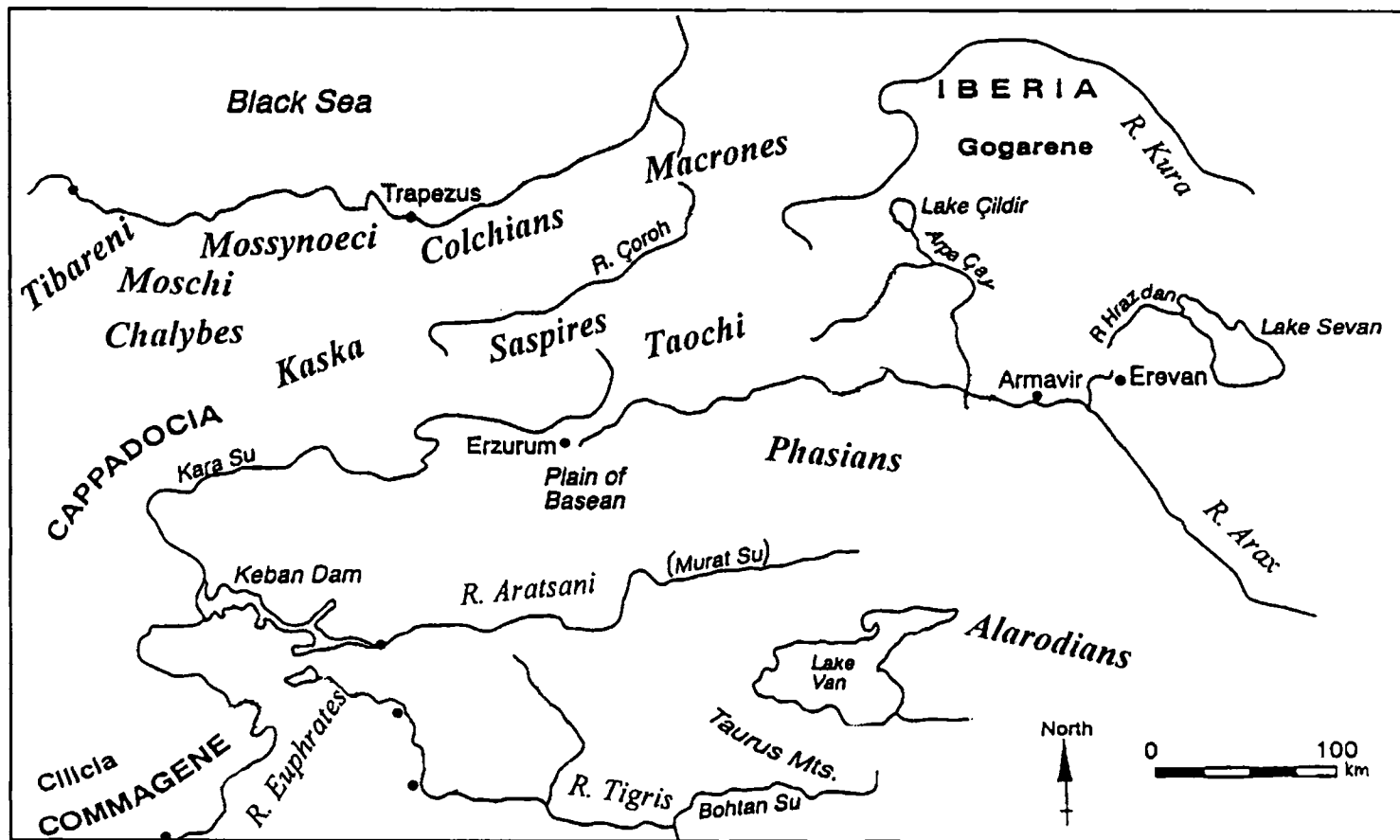
The historical process was depicted quite differently by Georgian historians who, like their Abkhazian counterparts, were attracted by the image of a Golden Age; the latter was linked with the Early Middle Ages and the climax of the Georgian civilization under David the Builder and Queen Tamar in the 12th – very early 13th centuries. Later historical periods, full of tragic events and disasters, met with less enthusiasm and did not attract that much attention from Georgian authors (for example, see Bakradze 1878: VI-VII). Instead, continual discussion focused on the roots of the Georgian state and the Georgian people. Having no reliable evidence for any simple conclusions, the Georgian researchers were intrigued by all these issues. First, they searched the far distant past, and second, tried hard to find ancestors among the founders of the earliest Near Eastern civilizations. Interesting to note, the best Georgian historians occupied themselves with this sort of project; somewhat later, they were joined by archaeologists. Before the revolution, these few specialists worked mainly outside Georgia, and as a rule, only less trained amateur enthusiasts focused on the history of their own people within Georgia. A professional Georgian school only formed in Tbilisi in the 1920s – 1930s to concentrate on the history of the Georgian people. Local professional archaeology emerged during the same period as well. The Academician Ivan A. Dzhavakhishvili played a crucial role in its development. As early as in 1908 he called archaeology the main tool for the reconstruction of the early history of the Georgian people. The first archaeological teams were created at the State Museum of Georgia and Tbilisi State University. Later on, the N. Ya. Marr Institute of Language, History and Material Culture was established in 1936 at the Georgian branch of the Academy of

Sciences of the USSR, which included an archaeological department as well (Melikishvili 1959: 10, note 3; Lordkipanidze 1976: 3-4, 1979a: 22-24, 1982: 5-7).

The Georgians concentrated on the southeastern Black Sea region in the 1870s, after Russian-Ottoman relationships got worse, the mass maxadzhirian migration to Turkey took place, and the future of the eastern Black Sea region became a hot issue. The prominent Georgian historian, D. Bakradze, who was interested in the local Christian heritage as well as the relations between the local population and the Georgians, visited Ajaria and Guria in 1873. He recorded the Christian churches and Georgian inscriptions of the 9th – 12th centuries in northeastern Turkey, and pointed to the close bonds between the Ajars and the Laz, on the one hand, and the Georgians, on the other hand. Citing Herodotus and Strabo, Bakradze located the Laz of classical times within an extensive region, which included Trebizond and reached the Halys (Kyzyl Irmak) River in the west. He pointed to the linguistic and cultural similarities between the Ajars and the Laz, on the one hand, and the Georgians, on the other hand, and argued that they were “one and the same people – the Kartvelians” (Bakradze 1878: 45). At the same time, he himself was not quite sure about that, and sometimes he opposed the Georgians to the Laz and Mingrelians (Bakradze 1878: 29). His followers were more straightforward.

A. S. Khakhanov (Khakhanashvili) was one of the first to address the issue of the earliest Georgian ancestors. He searched for them in Asia Minor (Khakhanov 1903). He based his ideas on Biblical sources, Josephus Flavius' narratives, and evidence from the classical Greek and Roman authors, all of whom mentioned the names of the numerous tribes occupying the northern regions of the early Near East and Transcaucasia during various periods. Khakhanov tried to figure out which of those names might have been connected with the Georgian ancestors. As a result, he listed “Meshekh” (Meseh, Moschi, Mushki, Mossynoeci), “Tubal” (Tabal, Tibareni), “Macrones”, “Saspies”, “Chalybes”, “Chans” (Tzannoi, Sannoi, Sanigai), and “Kashka/Kaska” (Colchians) among the latter. Initially, all of them lived in the northern regions of Asia Minor, close to the Halys River and also in the southeastern Black Sea region as far as the Çoroh River Valley in the northeast, and sometimes their area expanded to Cilicia in the south and the Upper Euphrates River in the east. By the mid-1st Millennium B.C., their area has shifted far eastward of the Halys River, and they were included in the XIX Satrapy of the Achaemenian Empire (map 16)²⁴).

By the time of Strabo, i.e. at the very beginning of the Christian era, some of them already lived in the southwest Georgian highlands and Colchis; others stayed in Asia Minor. Their descendants are the contemporary Turkish Laz and Tzans. At the same time, Khakhanov located the Laz and the Sannoi in the late classical Lazica, i.e. in the southern part of western Georgia (the Çoroh River Valley). This corresponds better with the views of certain contemporary specialists, who believe that these tribes resettled from Colchis to their present location fairly recently (Beller-Hann 1995: 488). Based on logical reasoning, Khakhanov deduced that there were Colchians among all these related groups who ultimately gave birth to



Map 16 Tribes of northeastern Asia Minor and the southwestern Caucasus in the very late 1st Millennium B.C. (after Redgate 1998)

the Georgian people (Khakhanov 1903: 10-15). Yet, he recognized that he still lacked any hard evidence for the identification of the early Colchis population with the Georgians (Khakhanov 1903: 18).

His assumption that the creators of the Van cuneiform inscriptions, the "Alarodians" (i.e. the Urartians. V. Sh.), might be identified with the Tibareni or Moschi, i.e. the Georgians, was even less well grounded. Yet, he emphasized that in those early days the Georgians occupied a substantial part of historical Armenia, long before the Armenian arrival (Khakhanov 1903: 19-20, 25, 39-55). The Chalybes, or Chaldaei, the well-known "inventors" of iron metallurgy, who were placed in the northern highlands of the Near East by certain classical authors, were also included in the list of Georgian ancestors by Khakhanov (Khakhanov 1903: 23-24).

It seemed very important to him, not only to reconstruct the maximum extensions of the territory occupied by the Georgians in the early days, and to identify numerous Georgian ancestors in the Late Bronze and Early Iron Age, but also to restore the glorious pages of their distant past. He was proud that the Mushki dominated Asia Minor in the 12th century B.C. and were successfully competing with even the Assyrians, and that the Moschi and Tibareni participated in the Scythian raids on Syria later on (Khakhanov 1903: 33). Moreover, with reference to archaeological data from Early Iron Age sites in the valleys of the Kura and Arax Rivers, Khakhanov argued that, in typological terms, the early Georgian civilization was similar to the Mycaenian, and in general Helladic. He placed their common roots in Mesopotamia and assumed that the Hittites played a crucial role in the dissemination of cultural achievements from there (Khakhanov 1903: 60). To put it differently, in order to restore the earliest Georgian past and to search for the Georgian ancestors, the Georgian Khakhanov used the same historical data and the same approach to their interpretation that the Abkhazian Gulia did later on. This method doomed both the Georgian and the Abkhazian historical schools to permanent competition throughout the 20th century.

What was the role of the Abkhazians in Khakhanov's views of the past? He was quite certain that they were different from the Georgians both in language and in origins. Following the first Georgian historian, D. Bakradze (Bakradze 1878: VI), he identified the earliest Colchis population with Georgian-speaking tribes and assumed that the Abkhazians arrived there much later. Yet, whereas Bakradze derived the Abkhazians from behind the Caucasian ridge in the north and dated their migration to the period between the 11th and 17th centuries (for that, see Hewitt 1993: 274, 1998: 118), Khakhanov believed that their arrival might be dated to the 2nd century A.D. It seems like he considered the Mingrelians to be the only inhabitants of Sukhum and its vicinity up to the 10th – 11th centuries A.D. In order to prove that, Khakhanov referred to a coin with a Georgian inscription, found in the territory of Sukhum (Khakhanov 1903: 62-63). Concerning the easternmost borders of the early Georgian area, Khakhanov went so far as to find some Georgian groups among the Caucasian Albania population, and thus extend their

borders as far as the Caspian Sea. In fact, there were no good reasons for that; Khakhanov expected that archaeologists would find evidence for it in the future (Khakhanov 1903: 63-64).

Khakhanov presented his concepts for the first time in a presentation at the 8th Congress of Scientists and Physicians in St. Petersburg, and the first version of his paper was published in 1890. His approach was characteristic of the Georgian historical field in the 1900s – 1920s. During that period, many Georgian historians derived the Georgians from the northern regions of the Near East, argued their primordial “national unity” and dated the roots of their state to the Early Iron Age, as though they still lived in Asia Minor at that time. This view was not only shared by major Georgian historians, but was represented in school textbooks (for that, see Soselia 1931: 183-201).

All of this was revised in the beginning of the 1930s. At that time, any “national unity” in the remote past was already out of question, and the “early Georgians” were represented as various distinct tribes who arrived to Transcaucasia separately from each other. One had to forget also about any “early Georgian state” in classical or earlier times, as the Marxist paradigm left no space for a state in a “clan society”. Thus, the hypothesis of the well-known Georgian historian, I. A. Dzhavakhishvili, of some “Colchian state” at the time of Strabo lost ground, and Dzhavakhishvili himself was accused of nationalism and a reactionary approach to history (Soselia 1931)²⁵. At the same time, as in Abkhazia, this did not cause any grave administrative persecutions, nor was the older generation of Georgian historians accused of “bourgeois migrationism”. Their Marxist critics themselves stuck to the idea of migrations of early Kartvelians to Transcaucasia from the south (for example, see Soselia 1931: 211). Apparently, the autochthonist paradigm, introduced by Marr, could not deprive the Georgians of the familiar beginnings of their history; they were not able to go that far, and did their best to adhere to the traditional approach.

Meanwhile, a great blow was dealt to the Georgian historical tradition, not so much by the introduction of the Marxist methodology as by the sensational discoveries of the Czech scholar, B. Hrozny, who related the Hittite language to Indo-European stock. After that, an obviously confused Dzhavakhishvili acknowledged that “all the grounds for the previous construction of the earliest stages of the Georgian history have disappeared” as scholars began to identify the Mushki and Tabals with the Indo-Europeans (Dzhavakhishvili 1950: 227-228)²⁶. There were two ways to solve the puzzle – either give up any search for Georgian ancestors in the south and develop a new idea, or put into question Hrozny’s approach, which turned out to be shared by most professionals. Dzhavakhishvili attempted to follow the former track, but the latter path seemed to be preferable to his student, Simon N. Dzhanaashia.

Professor Ivane A. Dzhavakhishvili (1876-1940) is considered to be the founder of the Soviet Georgian historical school. From his early days, he dreamed of studying his own people’s history. After graduation from the gymnasium in 1895,

he entered the Armenian-Georgian-Iranian Department at St. Petersburg University, where the well-known scholars, N. Ya. Marr and A. Tsagareli were among his tutors. He was especially interested in the history of the Georgian state and law, and in 1905, he successfully defended his Ph. D. thesis, focused on the state structure of early Georgia and Armenia. Yet, Dzhavakhishvili was a man of very broad knowledge and fairly wide scholarly interests. In the year after his dissertation came out in 1905, he published a booklet on the political movements in Georgia in the 19th century. The censors considered this book too radical. All its copies were eliminated, and the author was brought to trial. In the meantime, Dzhavakhishvili labored to develop Georgian studies. From 1903 he gave lectures on the history of Georgia and Armenia in St. Petersburg University, and sometimes even in Georgia during his brief visits there. In 1907, he founded a seminar for students concentrating on Georgian studies, and in 1917, he resettled to Tbilisi and became among the founders of Tbilisi University, which opened on January 26, 1918. In 1919-1926, Dzhavakhishvili was the rector of the University, and then a professor there until the end of his days. Only for a brief period in 1931 – 1933, during the time of the “Marxist revolution” in the historical field did Dzhavakhishvili lose his connections with the University. Then he worked as the chairman of a department in the Georgian Pedagogical Institute. He was reinstated as a university professor after that, however. From 1931, he collaborated with the State Museum of Georgia, where he was the Chairman of the Department of History from 1936. During his last few years, Dzhavakhishvili was highly respected in Georgia. He was elected a deputy and a member of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Georgian SSR in 1938, and a member of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR in 1939.

In the early 1950s, the former N. Ya. Marr Institute of Language, History and Material Culture was renamed the Dzhavakhishvili Institute of History, Archaeology and Ethnography. His four-volume “History of the Georgian people” was one of his major works. Contemporary Georgian scholars regard it as the first attempt to create a scholarly version of Georgian history. During his later years, Dzhavakhishvili focused entirely on the ethnogenesis of the Georgian people. Actually, this issue had attracted him since his trip to the Sinai in 1902 in search of Georgian manuscripts. He directed an ambitious archaeological project in Mtskheta-Samtavro that commenced in the late 1930s (Dzhanashia 1941; Melikishvili 1976, 1986; Dzhorbenadze 1984). It is worth noting that the Mtskheta archaeological project that was directed by Dzhavakhishvili and his former student Dzhanashia, served as the main training ground for future Georgian archaeologists (Lordkipanidze 1976: 4).

Dzhavakhishvili was struck by Hrozný’s achievements, especially after Hrozný gave lectures in Tbilisi at the very end of the 1930s. After that, it became evident that one could not but revise the former views of Georgian roots in the south. Dzhavakhishvili turned to the north, where the Scythian-Sarmatian nomads came to Transcaucasia across the Caucasian Mountain ridge. He believed that the Abkhazians had come to Colchis from the north, and he was curious if the

Kartvelian ancestors could have arrived from that direction as well. Indeed, Marr was inclined to identify the Colchians with the Scythians; he included the Tubals-Tibareni into this entity, and derived them from the northern Caucasus (Marr 1926: 147, 1938: 247). Curiously, whereas Strabo's evidence was interpreted by Khakhanov as proof of the southern origins of the Georgians (Khakhanov 1903: 4-8), Dzhavakhishvili referred to it with the aspiration of confirming Kartvelian affiliations with the Scythian-Sarmatian world (Dzhavakhishvili 1950: 228-229).

Yet, this seemingly promising approach clashed with a serious obstacle – the overwhelming view that the Scythians spoke an Iranian language. Dzhavakhishvili carried out a vast project aimed at the revision of the traditional etymologies; he analyzed a great number of epigraphic sources, tribal names and place names. He came to the conclusion that the Caucasian Scythian-Sarmatian world employed the lexicon of the North Caucasians. Most of this was of Adyghe origin, but Chechen and Lezghin elements were also present. Thus, the “Scythians and Sarmatians were part of the north Caucasian Adyghe-Chechen-Lezghin people”. Moreover, Dzhavakhishvili managed to find North Caucasian elements in Georgian place names, including both eastern and western Georgia. One could trace these sorts of tribal and place names even further down, in Caucasian Albania, on the one hand, and in Asia Minor, on the other hand. There were good grounds to relate this particular lexical stratum to the Hatti and proto-Chaldaei lexical materials! All of these linguistic data might serve as persuasive evidence of the vast territory occupied by the ancestors of the contemporary north Caucasian peoples in the remote past. They might have settled throughout all the Caucasus and the northern part of the Near East before the Indo-Europeans and the Kartvelians, let alone Turkic-speaking people arrived there. That is just how the issue is interpreted by historical linguists nowadays (Diakonov 1968: 10-22; Diakonov, Starostin 1988; Ivanov 1985)²⁷).

Yet, Dzhavakhishvili was by no means satisfied with this approach. He did his best to use his discoveries to return to the orthodox view! He argued that the “Scythian-Sarmatian” tribes moved to the Caucasus from the south and that neither the Tubal/Tibareni nor the Mushki/Meschi had anything to do with the Indo-European world (Dzhavakhishvili 1939, 1950)²⁸).

What relationship does all of this have to the Georgian ancestors? A most direct one! Indeed, by the late 1930s, the Georgian linguists had put forward a hypothesis of an Iberian-Caucasian relationship and constructed an Iberian-Caucasian language family, embracing both the Kartvelians and the North Caucasians (Chikobava 1952; Melikishvili 1976: 18)²⁹). Dzhavakhishvili was an ardent advocate of this approach (for that, see Melikishvili 1976: 18; Anchabadze 1976: 18; Dzhaparidze 1980: 22). As had been established further on, this hypothesis proved to be quite erroneous³⁰). However, it corresponded perfectly well to the Georgian political expansion of 1937-1953. Moreover, this made it easy for Georgian historians to appropriate the early past of the north Caucasian peoples (Marykhuba 1994b: 59).

Simon N. Dzhnashia (1900-1947) was a student of the Academician Dzhavakhishvili. He was born in the village of Makvaneti, to the family of the Georgian ethnographer, schoolteacher and public activist, N. S. Dzhnashia. In 1922, he graduated from the Department of History and Linguistics, Tbilisi State University, and then was a postgraduate student under professor Dzhavakhishvili. Beginning in 1926, he gave lectures on the history of Georgia and on the Abkhazian language at Tbilisi State University. In 1935 he was granted a professorship and appointed the Chairman of the Department of the History of Georgia. In 1936, he also became acting director of the newly established Institute of Languages and History of Material Culture (later the Institute of History, Archaeology and Ethnography of the Academy of Sciences of the Georgian SSR). His field of scholarly interests was as broad as that of his tutor. Although his doctoral thesis (1938) focused on the "Feudal Revolution in Georgia", he was interested not only in the history of Georgia, but also in the Caucasian highlanders in general, and he was fluent in Abkhazian. He initiated the largest archaeological studies in pre-war Georgia, carried out in Mtskheta and some other areas, which he directed starting in 1937. Dzhnashia made a valuable contribution to the development of Georgian scholarship. He was the founder of the Georgian Linguistic Society, the deputy president of the Georgian branch of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR (from 1939), and later he was awarded the title of Academician of the Academy of Sciences of the Georgian SSR (in 1941), and vice-president of the Academy of Sciences of the Georgian SSR. In 1943, he was elected Academician of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR, and, in 1946, was elected a deputy of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. For his scholarly and organizational merits, he was awarded two Orders of Lenin, and was twice a Stalin Prize winner (Dzhnashia, 1948; *Izvestiia Akademii Nauk SSSR*, 1948, t. 5, N 1: 107-108; Melikishvili, Lomtadze 1949).

Dzhnashia was searching for Kartvelian ancestors among the well-known peoples of the early Near East no less persistently than his teacher. He remarked that the earliest civilizations of the Near East were founded by people who had nothing to do with the Indo-Europeans, Semites or Turks, and listed the most remote Kartvelian ancestors among those early people. In particular, he did his best to relate them to the Hittites and was convinced that the Kartvelian ancestors could have played an outstanding role in early Asia Minor. He argued that they had arrived in Transcaucasia from the south, settled in Armenia before the Armenians and in Abkhazia before the Abkhazians. He assumed that the Georgian alphabet was invented in the 7th century B.C. and that when the Kartvelians arrived in Georgia they already had their own writing system. In order to prove his hypotheses, he tried to mobilize archaeological data. He referred to the "Koban'-Colchian culture" of the Late Bronze Age which, in his view, was developed by the Georgian ancestors³¹). Apparently, all of this made Dzhnashia reject Hrozný's idea of an Indo-European affiliation of the Hittites (Dzhnashia 1959a, 1959b, 1991: 18). At the same time, like Dzhavakhishvili, he shared the idea of Iberian-Caucasian

language relationships and found numerous Adyghe lexical elements in Georgian place names and even lexicon (Dzhanashia 1959c: 81-123). The idea of close relationships with the North Caucasian peoples helped Georgian historians to construct a great early history of the Georgian people, which would otherwise have been a difficult task.

What about Abkhazia? What was its role in early history, in the views of Georgian historians of the late 1930s – 1940s? In those days, Dzhanashia was considered the major expert in the field, and he kept developing the orthodox Georgian approach while enriching it with new, mainly archaeological, data. He believed that Georgian history began in the Late Bronze – Early Iron Ages. To this end, he identified the Colchians of the classical authors with the bearers of the “Koban’-Colchian archaeological culture” and, following Kuftin (Kuftin 1949: 135, map), located it between the Terek River in the north and Trebizond in the southwest³²). With reference to the classical authors, Dzhanashia depicted early Colchis as a prosperous country, rich in natural resources, in particular, gold. While mentioning the early Greek city-states in Colchis, Dzhanashia assumed that the local inhabitants themselves were creating their own cities and minting their “colchidki” coins³³). To put it briefly, he shared his teacher’s idea that the early Colchian state developed side by side with the Greek colonies. It goes without saying that he identified the population of this state as the remote Georgian ancestors.

Dzhanashia identified the Abkhazians with the Apsilae and the Abasgoi, who were first mentioned by classical writers in the 1st – 2nd centuries A.D. Yet, he avoided discussing the issue of when and how they arrived on the Colchis seashore. This might seem less important to him, as he included the Abkhazians in the same ethnic community as the Georgians and other Caucasian peoples; there was no question of different origins for the Abkhazians. This contrasted with what Bakradze and Khakhanov had written. Dzhanashia called Lazica, or Egrisi, (4th – 6th centuries A.D.) the first medieval kingdom in Colchis. He said it was dominant there for some time. Later on, the role of Lazica declined as a result of continuous wars against external enemies and ultimately subordination to Byzantium (Dzhanashia 1991: 18-40).

At the same time, the Abkhazian Principality got stronger in the 8th century, as it suffered less from foreign invasions and managed to use to its benefit the problems that were exhausting Byzantium. Concerning the aggressive foreign policies of the Abkhazian kings, Dzhanashia believed that they met contemporary demands and served to unify Georgia, as though this had already been the goal of the Lazica rulers. In his view, Abkhazia had fallen into decline by the end of the 10th century, and Bagrat III, the stepson of the Tao-Klargeti ruler, had completed the unification of Georgia. Abkhazia constituted his “inheritance from his mother’s side” (Dzhanashia 1952, 1991: 40-48).

Thus, the history of Abkhazia was an integral part of the overall history of Georgia, in Dzhanashia’s works. Yet, Dzhanashia’s approach included several

points that had to be appreciated by the Abkhazians. These were that the Apsilae and the Abasgoi moved from the southeast to the northwest, rather than vice-versa in early medieval times (Dzhanashia 1991: 39), that the term Apsilae was closely related to the Abkhazian self-designation "Apswa", and that Queen Tamar's son was nicknamed "Lasha" which derived from the Abkhazian term for "light" (Dzhanashia 1991: 24). All of this proved that the Abkhazians were the early settlers at the territory of Abkhazia and played an important role in the Georgian state.

At the meantime, as in other republics, the Georgian scholars were ordered to write a "History of Georgia". The best historians were involved in this project, and the first version of the volume was completed by the Academician Dzhavakhishvili and his students, S. Dzhanashia and N. Berdzenishvili, in 1941. Those chapters that dealt with the early and medieval periods up to the 10th century A.D. were written by Dzhanashia. A revised version of this work was published in Georgian in 1946 and approved as the standard textbook for secondary schools (for the Russian edition, see Berdzenishvili, Dzhavakhishvili, Dzhanashia 1950).

The textbook took an intentional primordialist approach, and began the history of Georgia from Palaeolithic times, as was common for this sort of publication. It depicted the teleological process of the consolidation of Georgian tribes around a national cultural core represented by Kartli, which ultimately resulted in the emergence of the Georgian nation. There was no explanation as to why they had consolidated at all or why Kartli served as the core. In any case, political factors were neglected by the authors, and the primary role of cultural-religious factors was emphasized instead. Yet, nothing was said about the fact that western Georgia enjoyed use of the Greek language and writing system, and was in the ecclesiastical sphere of Byzantium in early medieval times, while a different Church eparchy developed in eastern Georgia. Instead, Dzhanashia went so far as to maintain that literate people of the 6th – 7th centuries identified Kartli with both eastern Georgia and Egrisi. (This was during the period when Kartli was dependent on Persia, whereas Lazica was subordinated to Byzantium! V. Sh.). While referring to external medieval sources, the authors included the Abkhazians and the Ossetians rather than only the Georgians in the "national cultural Georgian entity" (Berdzenishvili, Dzhavakhishvili, Dzhanashia 1950: 7). In search of the earliest Georgian ancestors, Dzhanashia had constructed some "Hittite-Iberian entity" which he identified with the Yaphetic family of languages established by Marr and revised by the Georgian linguist, A. Chikobava (for that, see Dzhaparidze 1980: 25). He identified the Georgian ancestors with the "Hittite-Subareans", who settled from Asia Minor to northern Mesopotamia and Transcaucasia in the 2nd Millennium B.C. Thus, the glorious history of the Hittites, Hyksos, and Mittani was ascribed to the Georgian ancestors (Berdzenishvili, Dzhavakhishvili, Dzhanashia 1950: 16-18)³⁴.

The textbook represented the orthodox view that the Mushki (Meschi) and Tubals were Georgian ancestors, and emphasized that they had enriched humanity by the invention of iron metallurgy. The state of Urartu was declared an early

Georgian state in fact (Berdzenishvili, Dzhavakhishvili, Dzhanashia 1950: 32-38). It is worth noting that, while being already aware of the two different cultural zones (western and eastern) in Transcaucasia in the Late Bronze Age, Dzhanashia still argued that the Caucasus was occupied by a homogeneous “Hittite-Subarean entity” at that time (Berdzenishvili, Dzhavakhishvili, Dzhanashia 1950: 23-31)³⁵.

The Colchians were simply called a “west Georgian tribe” and associated with the Colchian Kingdom, as though it had flourished at the time of Greek colonization and had its capital in the city of Aea on the Phasis (Rioni) River. The name of the capital was borrowed from the Argonaut myth. The “colchidki”, silver coins supposedly minted by the local rulers, were referred to as confirmation of this view. The Hellenistic Kingdom of Pontus was called Georgian for, in Dzhanashia’s view, Georgians accounted for the bulk of its population. That is why he appreciated victorious wars and territorial annexations made by its ruler, Mithridates VI Eupator (115-63 B.C.), in the very end of the 2nd – early 1st centuries B.C. While discussing the nature of Colchis’ population in the first centuries A.D. and enumerating various local tribes, including the Apsilae and the Abasgoi, Dzhanashia called them the “Colchian people”. The Abkhazian ancestors were not distinguished as a separate group³⁶.

It is worth noting that Dzhanashia was not satisfied with quite reliable evidence of the early Georgian writing system being introduced in the Early Middle Ages. He did his best to convince the reader that the Georgians enjoyed their own “early pagan writing system” (hieroglyphs and cuneiform!) in pre-Christian times, which had left no traces (Berdzenishvili, Dzhavakhishvili, Dzhanashia 1950: 92-95). Further on, Dzhanashia set forth the version of the political history of, first, Lazica and, then, the Abkhazian Kingdom, already known to us, and added certain details, which strengthened its Georgiacentric character. In particular, he argued that, already in the early medieval time, regardless of the political environment, the Kingdom of Kartli successfully disseminated among its neighbors both the Georgian language and its system of writing, which, he emphasized, were “easily borrowed by related Georgian tribes”. He wrote of the cultural rapprochement between Kartli and Egrisi, giving no explanation of why or how this could develop (Berdzenishvili, Dzhavakhishvili, Dzhanashia 1950: 138). Indeed, the dominant majority in Egrisi was made of Mingrelians, who were rather different from the Kartvelians in language (for details, see Hewitt 1995a).

Dzhanashia called the Abkhazian Kingdom the “west Georgian state” and maintained that the Georgian tribes of the Karts, Mingrelians and Svans accounted for the bulk of its population. In his view, the name “Abkhazian” was given to the state after its dynasty, but he did not explain why the dynasty had that name. Moreover, he argued that the south Georgian Principality of Tao-Klargeti had played a major part in the final unification of Georgia, and he was more interested in this particular principality than in Abkhazia. Dzhanashia emphasized that Georgian began to dominate in bureaucratic matters, the liturgy and belles-lettres in Abkhazia by the 9th century (Berdzenishvili, Dzhavakhishvili, Dzhanashia 1950:

152-165). At the same time, it was not ever mentioned in the textbook that the title of the Georgian Kings started with the name "King of the Abkhazians", and the nickname of Queen Tamar's son, Lasha, was given no explanation at all. At the same time, these latter points were of great importance to the Abkhazians. It goes without saying that the Abkhazians were entirely neglected in later chapters, and the South Ossetians enjoyed no place at all in this textbook.

To put it differently, the textbook aimed at painting a picture of a uniform Georgian nation, and ethnic minorities should not place obstacles in the way of developing that picture³⁷). Moreover, in order to build up the great early history of Georgia, the authors did not hesitate to use conjecture and exaggeration, and they also appropriated the past of early peoples who had nothing to do with the Georgians. They transferred the other peoples' territories to Georgia and, in fact, carried out a Georgian historiographic expansion that was in accordance with the fact that Georgia had been granted the lands of several North Caucasian peoples (the Karachais, Chechens and Ingush) who had been deported in 1944 (for that, see Suny 1988: 289; Dunlop 1998: 73). It is apparent that the idea of Iberian-Caucasian relationships also served as ideological grounds for this sort of policy.

The view of early Georgian history, having been analysed, was greatly appreciated in Georgia. A pamphlet on Soviet Georgia was published in Moscow in 1948. In this publication, the Georgians were included in the "Hittite-Iberian group", as though the latter had enjoyed the vast territory from Asia Minor and northern Mesopotamia up to the Caucasian Mountain ridge. The "Hittite-Subarean tribes" were called the founders of the Urartian state, whose Chaldaean population was identified with the Georgians. The Georgian writing system was displayed as an achievement of pre-Christian times. The emergence of the Iberian and Colchian Kingdoms was dated to the 6th century B.C., and all their population was identified solely with the Georgian ancestors. The Georgians were called a "gifted people" who not only persistently and successfully struggled against various invaders, but also brought forward a whole group of outstanding poets, philosophers and architects. There was no room for the Abkhazian people in this glorious history (Khachapuridze 1948: 7-10).

It is well known how thoroughly and critically Soviet ideologists analyzed the textbook on the history of the Kazakh SSR and others of this sort of textbook in the 1940s (for example, see Tillett 1969: 70-76). Nothing like this was observed with respect to the Georgian textbook, although the preliminary version had come out two years before the Kazakh one did. By contrast, its publication was accompanied by a series of generous reviews. It is obvious that the attitude of the Soviet authorities toward the history of Georgia was different from, say, the history of Kazakhstan or the Ukraine. In fact, Georgian historiographic expansion in all its details followed the example of Russian historiography of those days (for the latter, see Shnirelman 1995a; 1996a). It is also instructive to note that the campaign in the struggle against "bourgeois nationalism" waged in Georgia in the fall of 1952 did not affect Georgian historians (Suny 1988: 289-290). Apparently, the Russian and

Georgian historians were allowed to do what was forbidden to any of their counterparts in the USSR. One of the reasons for this sympathy to the Georgian historical myth from the side of the Soviet authorities, regardless of its obvious migrationist basis, was the character of Soviet foreign policy in the late 1940s. Indeed, as was already noted, after the western USSR borderlands were successfully expanded, Stalin was dreaming of new territorial annexations at the expense of southern neighbors (Chuev 1991: 55-56). We already know of the anti-Iranian and anti-Turkish campaigns inspired by Soviet authorities among the Armenians and the Azeris.

It was just at that time that the Tbilisi newspaper, "Komunisti", published an article by major Georgian historians, the Academicians Dzhnashia and Berdzenishvili, who, having been the authors of the approach in question, claimed the Turkish lands east of Trebizond and north of Erzurum, as all this territory constituted a genuine Georgian heritage. With reference to history, they strove to demonstrate that Georgian ethnic territory had always covered the region between the Greater Caucasus and the Greater Taurus Mountains. They also maintained that the "Hittites and the Subareans, the direct ancestors of the Georgian people, dominated the Near East". They called the state of Urartu the stronghold of "Georgian civilization" and argued that, after it had fallen, the Georgian people still managed to found new political centers, which gradually shifted northward. Besides Colchis and Iberia, the authors referred to some state of the Saspis and made it one of the largest Near Eastern states of Herodotus' time (Herodotus knew nothing of this state! V. Sh.). The Laz, or Chans, who still live in northeastern Turkey, were viewed by the authors as direct descendants of the early Colchis population and heirs of the medieval Trebizond Empire. They also pointed to the great political importance of the southwest Georgian principality of Tao-Klargeti for the formation of the united Georgian state, and represented "Southern Georgia", which makes up part of contemporary Turkey, as if it was the cradle of the Georgian culture. The Turkish people were represented as mere barbarians who brought about only death and destruction. The authors stated that the Georgians had never abdicated their southern lands, which served as the "cradle of our folk individuality", and maintained that heavy Georgian losses at the time of World War II granted them the right to claim lands that had been illegally annexed by Turkey (Dzhnashia, Berdzenishvili 1945).

Having been first published in the major newspaper of the Georgian Communist Party, the article was immediately republished by central Soviet media – the newspapers "Pravda", "Izvestia", "Krasnaia zvezda". All this proved that the campaign had been thoroughly planned by Party officials. It was no accident that the main ideas of the article were reproduced by the Secretary of the CC CPG, Charkviani, in his own article, devoted to the 25th jubilee of Soviet Georgia. While glorifying Soviet Georgia, he complained that at least one age-old dream of the Georgian people was still unrealized, namely the "restoration of the territorial integrity of Georgia". He enumerated those Turkish territories that had to be given

back to the Georgians (for that, see Khachapuridze 1948: 14).

Western political scientists point out that the tense Soviet-Turkish negotiations were carried on at that time, and assume that the resounding irredentist campaign had been launched in order to put pressure on Turkey (Kolarz 1952: 234; Kuniholm 1980: 287). Without playing down this factor, one has every reason to assume that Stalin really had in mind the territorial expansion of the USSR at the expense of Turkey and Iran³⁸). It is worth mentioning that passion about the southern lands excited Georgia for several years, and met with sympathy in Moscow. Indeed, a few years later the same historians published a pamphlet focused on claims for Turkish lands. A major Soviet historical magazine emphasized that, while claiming that the lands had been illegally taken by Turkey, Dzhanashia expressed the view of the entire Soviet Georgian population (Dzhanashia 1948). The well-known Georgian poet, Grigol Abashidze, had composed a poem glorifying the lands of the old Georgian province of Tao, which were located in Turkish territory. For that, he was awarded the Stalin Prize in 1950. Yet, the annexation of Turkish land never came to pass.

In the meantime, internal policy developed more successfully. Indeed, the historical views formed in 1937-1939 were in perfect accordance with the plans of the Georgian authorities, aimed at the Georgianization of the Abkhazians and their integration into a homogeneous Georgian community. Simultaneously, they had to end Abkhazian aspirations to build up their own distinctive historical viewpoint. That is why the Soviet authorities got fairly suspicious about the activities of the Abkhazian Research Institute, whose staff was accused of the “study of cultural issues in the manner of bourgeois nationalism” (Clogg 1995: 184). They recollected in the KGB Ashkhatsava’s and Basaria’s ill-fated books and condemned them as anti-Georgian and counterrevolutionary (Clogg 1995: 182-183). Yet, since their authors had already been eliminated, Dmitry Gulia’s “History of Abkhazia” turned out to be their main target. First, it was still fairly popular among the Abkhazians, particularly due to the great reputation of its author, and second, it was a challenge to the Georgians, who treated it as an attack against their virtue. The authorities thought that Gulia himself should retract the book. However, he was brave enough to reject this sort of suggestion. Ultimately, in 1951, the then Chairman of the Soviet of Ministers of the Abkhazian ASSR, M. K. Delba, ordered the publication of a pamphlet called “About my Book, the History of Abkhazia” under the name of Gulia. The pamphlet was completed under pressure of the KGB and sent to all the required addresses. When Gulia was asked who would be able to write this sort of pamphlet, he recommended Sh. D. Inal-Ipa quite highly, and the latter had to take this responsibility. However his criticism of Gulia’s book was considered too mild, and Delba practically rewrote the review from the very beginning. Later on, Inal-Ipa recalled that he was unable to recognize his own text when he read a published copy³⁹). When the political climate relaxed, Dmitry Gulia was able to state that the pamphlet had been falsified. Delba tried to justify his own actions by saying that the pamphlet had been completed and published in order to rescue Gulia from

repression (Gulia 1962: 219-221). Indeed, Gulia was already being watched by the KGB as early as 1946, and was threatened with execution (Smyr 1994: 17-18; Clogg 1995: 179).

Yet, it is doubtful that Delba, being cynical, like many Soviet bureaucrats, cared very much about the Abkhazian people or their poet⁴⁰. Indeed, while the head of the Abkhazian People's Commissariat of Education during the worst period, he actively participated in the elaboration and implementation of the destructive school reforms that took place from the end of the 1930s. He also played an active role in the trial against "Lakoba's followers" in the fall of 1937 (Lakoba 1990: 132-133; Marykhuba 1996a: 118, 122). This did not provide him much security, and he was also kept under watch by the KGB. They suspected him of "counterrevolutionary activities" only because, while the Director of the Abkhazian Glavlit (Publishing Committee) he had not stopped the publication of Gulia's, Ashkhatsava's and Basaria's books. In 1947, with leading Abkhazian intellectuals, Delba entered the list of "bourgeois nationalists" compiled in the KGB (Clogg 1995: 184, 187).

At the same time, Delba, while criticizing Marr's ideas in 1951, came out against the "erroneousness and fallaciousness of ... the isolation of both the Abkhazian language and the history of the Abkhazians from the Georgian language and the history of Georgia". In his view, one of Marr's worst errors was that the latter avoided treating the "Abkhazians as a Georgian tribe". By contrast, Delba himself argued that the "Abkhazians as a Georgian tribe were an integral part of the Georgian people throughout all their history" (Delba 1952).

This idea was at the core of the pamphlet that had been published in Gulia's name. Abkhazia was treated there as an "inseparable part of Georgia", and had to enjoy the place of a satellite, as though it was preoccupied only with the dream of building a "national Georgian state". The pamphlet's author abandoned all the conclusions of the "History of Abkhazia", not only those that had proved to be obsolete (like the Abkhazian origins in Ethiopia, and identification of the term "Abyssinia" with "Apsny"), but also those supported by major Georgian scholars (like Adyghe-Abkhazian place names in Georgia). He certainly revised the views that threw into doubt the historical superiority of the Georgians in Abkhazia (like those of the non-Kartvelian origins of the early Colchis inhabitants, the cultural backwardness of the interior Georgian tribes with respect to the Abkhazian shore dwellers, etc.).

The pamphlet reproduced the Messianic version of early Georgian history that was developed by Georgian historians of those days. It told of the extensive settlement of the early Georgians throughout the Near East and Transcaucasia, of their civilizing activities and construction of many cultural centers, of their genetic links with the Hittites and Chaldaei, of the Georgian identity of the Colchians, and of an independent Georgian state, as though the latter had emerged long before the Christian era (for example, see Pirtskhalava 1948; Khachapuridze 1948: 7-10). The Abkhazian Kingdom was viewed as a "west Georgian state" that worked very hard to unite all the Georgian tribes within one "national state". While appreciating the

ideological climate of those days, the author attacked German historians and linguists, whose ideas had once been referred to by Gulia. The pamphlet openly stated that the “Abkhazians were Georgians”. With reference to the aforementioned article by Dzhnanashia and Berdzenishvili, the Turkish people were represented as bloodthirsty enemies of the Georgians. During the period of the forcible Georgianization of the Abkhazians, the author turned against the “Turkish assimilators”, represented by Kelesh-bey, the Abkhazian ruler of the very late 18th – very early 19th centuries, as a “traitor” whose aspiration was to partition Georgia (Gulia 1951). It is worth mentioning in passing that Kelesh-bey is still highly respected by the Abkhazians (for example, see Basaria 1923: 140; Fadeev 1934: 142-145; Inal-Ipa 1965: 145; Lakoba 1990: 8-9, 1993: 159-161, 1998a: 67-68; Smyr 1994: 11).

Later on, Gulia told in his autobiography how they impeded his studies of Abkhazian history and ethnology. Through a decision by the Bureau of the Abkhazian branch of the CPG, this autobiography was eliminated in 1956, together with all copies of the magazine, “Alashara” (“Dawn”), where it was published (Smyr 1994: 18). They also failed to publish Delba’s letter of October 1, 1953, addressed to the Abkhazian Branch of the CPG, in which he recognized his guilt for the composition of the aforementioned pamphlet and asked to withdraw it from circulation (Marykhuba 1994a: 96-97).

At that very time, while the campaign against Gulia’s book was expanding in Abkhazia, the Tbilisi magazine, “Mnatobi”, began to publish separate chapters of Pavle Ingoroqva’s book “Giorgi Merchule – a Georgian writer of the 10th century” in 1949-1951. The book itself, more than 1,000 pages in length, had come out in 1954 (Ingoroqva 1954). In view of certain scholars, the book was written by order of the KGB and was to serve as the scholarly groundwork for the resettlement of the Abkhazians out of Abkhazia (Lakoba 1990a: 97-98; 2000: 17; Lezhava 1997: 175-178). The Abkhazians’ origins were discussed in its fourth chapter. In fact, it completed the process of the historiographic Georgianization of the Abkhazians. Indeed, whereas Dzhavakhishvili and Dzhnanashia included the early Abkhazians in the Georgian entity, they did not infringe on the distinction of Abkhazian language and culture. By contrast, Ingoroqva identified the Apsilae as a “Georgian tribe with a Georgian dialect” and maintained that only Georgian tribes lived in Abkhazia in the 8th century A.D. (Ingoroqva 1954: 116)⁴¹. He also argued that the Georgians-Moschi gradually began to call themselves the Abkhazians (Ingoroqva 1954: 129, 137). Whereas Dzhavakhishvili and Dzhnanashia recognized that the Abkhazians lived in Colchis in the classical period, Ingoroqva refused to locate them there until late in the Middle Ages; instead, he claimed that they arrived in Abkhazia from out of the great Caucasian mountain ridge in the 17th century (Ingoroqva 1954: 188. Also see “Mnatobi”, 1950, N 3: 146-189)⁴². Whereas Dzhavakhishvili and Dzhnanashia revealed a substantial Adyghe-Abkhazian substratum among Georgian place names, Ingoroqva radically revised their conclusions and did his best to prove that even the Abkhazian place names in Abkhazia were of Georgian origin⁴³.

The view in question was not anything new for Ingoroqva. Indeed, as early as 1918, he took an active part in the hot territorial dispute growing between the newly established states in Transcaucasia. Naturally, his conclusions were favorable to Georgia. In particular, he called the Abkhazians a "Georgian tribe" in his report "On the Georgian Borders" (Lezhava 1997: 175-178)⁴⁴.

Ingoroqva's book enjoyed several generous reviews in the Georgian media. One of them was written by the Academician G. S. Axvlediani, who appreciated most of all the fact that Ingoroqva represented the Abkhazians as a Kartvelian tribe, and the Abkhazian Kingdom as a Georgian state. Henceforth, there was no place for aliens in the Georgian political process! "The Georgian state of western Georgia was founded by no means by any alien tribe (as a result of invasion), but was built up by Georgian tribes, the Georgian tribe of the Abkhazians being among them", the Academician concluded. He also praised Ingoroqva, because the latter included the place names of Abkhazia in the "Kartvelian language world" (Akhvlediani 1955). In 1956-1957, the magazine, "Mnatobi", arranged a discussion of Ingoroqva's volume, which demonstrated that several well-known Georgian historians and philologists (a Director of the Institute of History, Archaeology and Ethnography of the Academy of Sciences of the Georgian SSR, N. Berdzenishvili, as well as L. Kobakhidze, S. Kaukhchishvili, G. Axvlediani) shared his anti-Abkhazian stance. Several Georgian writers also supported Ingoroqva. Only the philologist, K. Lomtadze, dared to oppose the collective opinion of her colleagues (for that, see Marykhuba 1994a: 130-131; Lezhava 1997: 174-175; Hewitt 1998: 119). Since that time it became common among Georgian historians to treat the names "Bichvinta" (the Greek term for Pityus which means "pine place") and Heniokhoi (the Greek term for "charioteer") as genuine Georgian terms, which is implausible from a linguistic point of view (Hewitt 1998: 118-119, 121).

Ingoroqva's volume met with the opposite response among Abkhazians, who regarded it as an aspiration to "eliminate the national distinctions of the Abkhazian people" once again (Marykhuba 1994a: 124). Thoughtful Abkhazian authors did not fail to notice that Ingoroqva had radically revised his former approach by the beginning of the 1950s. Indeed, ten years earlier he had recognized the important role of the Abkhazians in the building of the Georgian state (Anchabadze 1956: 264, 273; Inal-Ipa 1965: 19, 1976: 50-51; Lakoba, Shamba 1989). They accused him of a tendentious approach, intentionally keeping silence or distorting historical evidence, implausible assumptions, revision of his own earlier ideas, and trust in highly dubious sources of information. In fact, the Abkhazians blamed Ingoroqva for the fact that he deprived them of their ethnic name and early history (Soselia 1955; Anchabadze 1956; Bgazhba 1956; Marykhuba 1994a: 129). As one of the Abkhazian critics concluded, the "Abkhazians, an indigenous people of the region, became homeless. They turned out to be not Abkhazians in the full meaning of this term but Apswas, who were also neglected in P. Ingoroqva's voluminous book" (Bgazhba 1956: 283).

Ingoroqva's book came out too late – the Stalin era was over, mighty Beria had

left the historical scene, and the Abkhazians realized that the time was ripe for a struggle for the improvement of their position. Indignant people began to send letters to Party and Soviet authorities, a political scandal was imminent, and officials strove to prevent this development. A meeting of the CC CPG was held on April 12, 1954, where they made a decision to withdraw Ingoroqva's book. However, the latter was defended by the Georgian scholars. Then the Abkhazians changed their strategy and began to send letters to the CC CPSU complaining that the right of the Abkhazian people for survival had been violated. In April 1957, they organized public protests in Sukhumi in front of the Abkhazian branch of the CPG. This made the CC CPG retreat on Ingoroqva's book. The publication of the discussion in "Mnatobi" magazine was condemned (*Za marksistsko-leninskuiu razrabotku* 1957), the wave of generous reviews was blocked, and their authors as well as the editors of the respective media suffered Party punishment. The ideas of Ingoroqva and the like became taboo (Lezhava 1997: 180-183; Gamakharia, Gogia 1997: 144, note 112).

At the same time, the condemnation of Ingoroqva's concepts by the Georgian authorities was rather formal: although the ideas themselves were recognized as erroneous, it was still unclear which errors, in particular, were made by Ingoroqva. His followers were condemned but their names were not mentioned. Only N. Berdzenishvili was openly criticized, yet for his wrong views on the "history of the formation of the Georgian nation" rather than for his distortions of Abkhazian history. What was wrong with the views of the well-known Georgian historian remained unknown to readers of the Georgian Communist newspapers and magazines. Nothing was said about how one should represent the history of Abkhazia (*Za marksistsko-leninskuiu razrabotku* 1957). To put it differently, the Georgian authorities made a formal demagogic reply that did not convince anybody. That is why Ingoroqva's ideas stayed alive in Georgia, although it was inappropriate to commit them to paper in the Soviet period. Only in 1989 did the Georgian writers demand the rehabilitation of Ingoroqva and his scholarly heritage (for that, see Hewitt 1998: 120). Since then, Ingoroqva's ideas have become very popular in Georgia, as we will see further on.

CHAPTER 4

ETERNAL GEORGIA

Not only did the political climate change radically in the early 1950s; Soviet scholarship enjoyed a drastic transformation, as well. First, Marr's heritage was finally abandoned; second, the linguistic situation in the early Near East became much clearer; third, extensive archaeological studies provided a lot of new materials for the reinterpretation of the early Georgian past, and archaeologists demanded serious consideration of their constructions.

Until the 1940s, the archaeological map of Georgia was covered with many lacunae; it was impossible to construct any clear pattern of cultural evolution in Transcaucasia with the very scarce data at hands; and the latter were ignored by historians, who were stuck to the migrationist approach. For example, the view was popular that the cultures of the early metallurgists had arrived in the Southern Caucasus from outside only at the turn of the 1st Millennium B.C. It is in this respect that historians were fascinated by all those Moschi, Tubals, Chalybes and others who have been already discussed. Meanwhile, a lot of new archaeological data were accumulated by the early 1940s, which made it possible to check how they corresponded to the orthodox historical views. The first who made this attempt was the outstanding Soviet archaeologist, B. A. Kuftin.

Boris A. Kuftin (1892-1953), who began his scholarly career as a specialist on the central region of Russia, suffered from the political repressions of the very late 1920s and was exiled from Moscow to Vologda, Northern Russia. Georgian colleagues helped him to move to Georgia in 1934, where he was first hired to process archaeological materials at the State Museum of Georgia, in order to prepare an archaeological exhibition. In 1934 – 1935, he took part in the ambitious Abkhazian archaeological project directed by the Academician I. I. Meshchaninov and attempted the first extensive archaeological survey of Abkhazia. Then, Kuftin himself continued these studies in the late 1930s and the late 1940s. Simultaneously, he made excavations in the Upper Khrami River Valley, where he discovered the brilliant Trialeti culture of the Middle Bronze Age. Thus, he proved to be a very experienced archaeologist who, in fact, developed the foundation of contemporary prehistoric archaeology in Georgia (Formozov 1995: 47, 71).

In particular, Kuftin discovered the Bronze Age of Georgia, which proved to be very rich and long lasting, which was a surprise to orthodox historians. Kuftin claimed that the orthodox schema needed radical revision. First, a long cultural

continuity, having been revealed by the archaeologists, advanced the issue of the local roots of the Georgian people. Second, although archaeologists had confirmed the early relationships of the local Transcaucasian culture with its southern neighbors, these contacts proved to be established with Mesopotamia rather than with Asia Minor, in contrast to what the orthodox historians taught. Third, Kuftin distinguished between two different cultural regions in the Caucasus during the Bronze Age – western and southeastern. He related the former to those “Adyghe” place names, which had been established by Dzhavakhishvili and Dzhanaashia (Kuftin 1944, 1949: 317-318)⁴⁵). While he assumed that the southeastern region (Southern Georgia, Armenia and, partly, Azerbaijan) might be related to the Kartvelians, the western one had nothing to do with them – only ancestors of the Abkhazian-Adyghe peoples could have lived there in the Bronze Age! And the classical authors located the Tibareni, Meschi and Colchians in the western region.

Yet Kuftin himself did not take his conclusion to its logical end; obviously, the contemporary intellectual and political environment made this inappropriate. Moreover, while following Marr, he first wrote about the continuous replacement of “socio-economic layers”. The “Koban’-Colchian culture” was associated by him with the “Spero-Iberian-Cimmerian world” which he identified with the “Iberians-Mingrelians”. The “Colchian ethnic layer” of the Early Iron Age was identified with the Mingrelians-Chans”. He interpreted the “Spero-Iberian substratum” as the basis for both the “Kartlian-Imeretian people” and the “Abasgian-Ovso-Svanic-Khevsuric tribal entity” which gave birth to the Abkhazian people, later on. Concerning the famous dolmen culture of the Early Bronze Age discovered in Abkhazia, Kuftin came to the following conclusion: “It is impossible to find any correspondence between this early population and the later tribes and peoples acting in history or living [in the region] nowadays who were subsequently formed”. Yet, he believed that one could relate the pre-Koban’ period to the “Pelagian layer” if only arbitrarily (Kuftin 1949: 233-236, 289, 311-322). It seems that the latter hypothesis predicted the entity that is called the North Caucasian family of languages by contemporary historical linguists. In any case, it is obvious that ideas about the correspondence between archaeological sites and linguistic groups were fairly obscure in the late 1930s. Kuftin was wrong in certain respects, his views were quite inconsistent in some other respects, but he predicted some things quite correctly.

He believed that the “east Georgian tribes” assimilated the “west Georgian” ones over the Middle and Late Bronze Age, and that there were numerous Georgian tribal groups in the territory of Georgia on the eve of Greek colonization. In any case, Kuftin’s concepts proved to be highly autochthonous, in contrast to the popular migrationist approach. He argued that not only the Georgian state but also the Georgian peoples themselves had roots mainly in the territory of Georgia; the southern newcomers took some part in the formation of the Georgian people, but their role was by no means decisive (Kuftin 1944, 1949: 2-3, 311). It took some time before Georgian historians accepted this conclusion. Yet, after the political

changes of the 1950s – 1970s it became the dominant one in Georgia (Melikishvili 1986: 58; Dzhaparidze 1980: 29; Lordkipanidze 1989: 16-17).

The new epoch demanded its own heroes. Since the early 1950s, Georgy A. Melikishvili (born 1918) became the major expert in the early history of Georgia. He was a man of the new generation, a well-trained historian, highly knowledgeable about dead languages. He graduated from Tbilisi State University in 1939, where the well-known Georgian historians, S. N. Dzhanelidze and G. V. Tsereteli, were among his tutors. Melikishvili had become a highly respected expert in the history of the early Near East and Transcaucasia by the 1950s. His doctoral thesis (1954) focused on the Near Eastern sources of early Transcaucasian history. In 1957, he was awarded the Lenin Prize for his studies on the state of Urartu, and he was elected an Academician of the Academy of Sciences of the Georgian SSR in 1960. In 1965, he became the Director of the Institute of History, Archaeology and Ethnography of the Academy of Sciences of the Georgian SSR. He was also engaged in teaching. In 1944, he began giving lecture courses at Tbilisi State University (Melikishvili 1979).

Melikishvili was the first Georgian historian to develop a concept of early Georgian history on the basis of the autochthonous approach with reference to archaeological data. For the first time, in June 1951, he presented his views in a paper given at the meeting of the Division of Social Sciences of the Academy of Sciences of the Georgian SSR held as part of the all-Union campaign launched at that time against Marrism. In formal terms, the paper dealt with the history of the Georgian people in general, but in fact it was focused on the earliest periods of this history only. Quite paradoxically, while attacking Marr's views, the speaker developed autochthonist ideas, which were most of all advocated by Marr himself. Melikishvili called on his colleagues to give up migrationist concepts and search for the roots of the Georgian people primarily within the territory of Georgia⁴⁶. He shared the Iberian-Caucasian hypothesis and argued that the Kartvelian languages were related to the North Caucasian ones (for details, see Melikishvili 1959: 94-97)⁴⁷. At the same time, the matter was not just a linguistic issue. True, in contrast to his predecessors, Melikishvili avoided identifying the Urartians and the Hittites with the Georgians. Yet he argued that assimilated groups that had lost their former languages, shifted to a Georgian one and made a substantial contribution to the formation of the Georgian people had to be identified as Georgians. Since some Hittite, Urartian and Hurrian tribes had been integrated into the Georgian unity, the Georgian people had every reason to consider themselves the "heirs of the Hittite and Hurrian-Urartian culture" (Melikishvili 1952: 11). This is how the orthodox Georgian historical concepts together with their political connotations once again gained a chance to survive! Indeed, in this view, it was sufficient to assimilate an ethnic minority in order to claim its culture and historical heritage. It is no accident that, while evaluating various ethnic characteristics, Melikishvili gave superiority to language (Melikishvili 1952: 5). It is difficult to avoid relating this approach to the continuous attempts of the Georgian authorities to Georgianize the Abkhazians.

True, Melikishvili's concept demonstrated important differences in respect to the orthodox views. While still identifying the Mushki, Chalybes, Colchians and other aforementioned groups with the early Georgians, this concept viewed them not as indigenous peoples of Asia Minor, but as newcomers from Transcaucasia, where the true and eternal Georgian Motherland was situated. The author linked these extensive resettlements with the decline of the state of Urartu, as if the powerful Georgian unity had emerged from its ruins (Melikishvili 1952: 36-41; Melikishvili, Lordkipanidze 1989: 183). He went so far as to identify the Phrygian Kingdom with another Georgian state, in this case in Asia Minor, and related it to the Mushki (Moschi) who were traditionally identified with the Georgians by Georgian historians (Melikishvili 1952: 43-45). He localized the Kingdom of Diauekhi in the northeastern region of contemporary Turkey and maintained that, while the Hurrians dominated there in the early days, power was taken by west Georgian tribes later on. Melikishvili shared the orthodox view that the earliest Colchian state had once competed with Urartu and then had risen again during the period of Greek colonization (Melikishvili 1952: 47-49). In brief, his concepts turned the Georgians into the only heroes of the glorious events of the early 1st Millennium B.C., who had managed to survive to the present and thus had every reason to claim the heritage of the great early states of the Near East.

What about the Armenians and the North Caucasians? What was their place in the space of the ancient Near East? Quite correctly, Melikishvili put the Armenians in the Indo-European ("Hittite-Luwian") world of Asia Minor. He reproduced the Armenian view of the association of an early unity between Armenians and the state of Hayasa. Yet he did his best to isolate the early Armenian history of Urartu. He maintained that an Armenian ethnic community had formed before the Armenians arrived in the territory of Urartu, and that was why they were not affected by the Urartian culture to any major extent (Melikishvili 1952: 45-46, 1959: 171)⁴⁸). However, this approach failed to explain why the Armenian language enjoyed a substantial Urartian substratum (Diakonov 1968: 200-201, 231), and avoided discussing the relationships between the Armenians and the Georgians in the territory of the former Urartu, where the author saw their migration flows occurring quite simultaneously. In fact, Melikishvili's view of the historical relationships of Georgians suffered an inconsistency. On the one hand, he denied any non-Kartvelian substratum in Georgian, and on the other hand, recognized some Hurrian-Urartian elements in Georgian (Melikishvili 1959: 111, 116-117, 178). Anyway, while turning the Georgians into the only heirs of the Urartian culture, he deprived the Armenians of this heritage and established the basis for the historiographic conflict between Georgian and Armenian scholars. True, later on he recognized that, while spreading throughout the territory of Urartu, the Armenians assimilated the local Hurrian-Urartian population (Melikishvili 1959: 234). Thus, they too were granted the chance to claim the Urartian heritage. Later on, when Urartian participation in the Armenian ethnogenesis was well established, Georgian authors began to argue that, while affecting the Armenians to a major extent, the

Urartians had no impact on the Georgians (for example, see Khidasheli 1973). Indeed, Georgian was less affected by the Hurrian-Urartian influence than Armenian was. Yet, there is no reason to deny this impact entirely (Diakonov 1968: 241-242, note 134, 135).

Concerning the North Caucasians, Melikishvili followed Dzhavakhishvili and identified them with the “Scythian-Sarmatian” newcomers. While proving unable to break entirely with the orthodox idea of their northern homeland, he took a radical sidestep while discovering traces of the North Caucasians in Asia Minor, long before the “Scythians” had arrived there. He was the first to introduce the idea to Soviet historiography that some North Caucasian tribes were mentioned by the names “Kashka” and “Abeshla” in the inscriptions of the Assyrian King Tiglath-Pileser I (1115-1077). The former were associated by Melikishvili with the “Kasogs” (Circassians) and the latter with the “Apsilae” (Abkhazians) (Melikishvili 1952: 30-32, 1959: 120, 167-170, 174. Sf. Diakonov 1968: 12-13). This discovery was greatly appreciated by the Abkhazians, and, as we shall see further on, was an important element in their own ethnogenetic schema, even though there was also an hypothesis that the Kashkas were the Kurds’ ancestors (Kapantsian 1947: 131-133). Moreover, as Melikishvili explained later, the names “Kashka” and “Abeshla” were by no means ethnic ones and were used during the time of the Hittites as collective names for the highlanders of northeastern Asia Minor (Melikishvili 1962: 319).

At any case, Melikishvili dated the first “Golden Age” of Georgian history to the second quarter of the 1st Millennium B.C., when numerous Georgian tribes migrated southward and founded successive states there. While doing that, they incorporated the Hurrians, Urartians and even the Mushki of Asia Minor. As a result, two early Georgian states were established – Colchis in the west and Iberia in the east, which were the basis for the integration of all the early Georgian tribes.

Association with early statehood and, thus, the right to their own sovereign state – this idea was a prime mover for Georgian scholars, who occupied themselves with the ethnogenesis of the Georgian people. It was at the core of Georgian ideology in general (Dragadze 1988: 10, 40). It was no accident that, as we know, both Dzhavakhishvili and Dzhanashia focused on the history of the early Georgian state as well as on Georgian origins. The same was true of Melikishvili, who did his best to trace the continuous development of the Georgian state tradition since Assyrian times. Yet it turned out that the “Moschi Kingdom”, which proved to be the state of the Indo-European Phrygians, did not fit that picture. Melikishvili focused on the less known country of Diauekhi, which was first mentioned by the Assyrians, and then in the Urartian inscriptions, as a polity located in the southwestern part of historical Georgia. There was no reliable evidence at all about the political organization or ethnic composition of the population there, but it was established that, for a long time, Diauekhi successfully resisted first Assyrian attacks and then Urartian raids. This seemed sufficient to allow Melikishvili to conclude that, if there was no well-established state there, there was still a proto-state structure, at least. His attempt to relate the local Saspis to the Iberians was

no less arbitrary. Yet, regardless of the poor basis for all these constructions, they made it reasonable to assume that the state tradition did not die out among the Georgians over millennia – it was inherited by the Kartli from the Diauekhi through the “Iberians-Saspire” (Melikishvili 1959: 102, 114, 116, 176-178, 203-209, 215-217, 234)⁴⁹). True, in another part of his seminal work, Melikishvili depicted a more plausible picture of the introduction of political organization to the early Georgians – from the Persians through the south Georgian regions that depended on Iran (Melikishvili 1959: 279).

Later on, Melikishvili elaborated his schema in the following way. He has revealed that Diauekhi was in permanent hostility with Qulhai. The latter name was close to that of Colchis, and Melikishvili shifted his interest to this promising association. He explained that the term “Colchis” had several meanings in the early days. The name itself was derived of Qulhai, a polity of the very late 2nd Millennium B.C. that dominated in the southeast Black Sea region. The classical Greeks attached a very broad meaning to this term, extending it over the vast territory between the great Caucasian Mountain ridge and Trebizond. Accordingly, they used the term “Colchians” for all the various tribal populations that, in contrast to what Dzhavakhishvili and Dzhanaashia taught, were by no means a homogeneous people. At the same time, certain classical authors linked this name with the southeast Black Sea region (between the Rioni and Çoroği Rivers) only where the Mingrelian-Chan population, i.e. the historical Laz (the Mingrelian ancestors), lived. Basing his ideas on still very scarce historical evidence, Melikishvili believed that Qulhai was an early state, at least in the 8th century B.C., when it was competing, albeit unsuccessfully, with Urartu (Melikishvili 1962. Also see Melikishvili 1959: 62-65, 259)⁵⁰).

While discussing all those numerous groups in the northeast of Asia Minor (Chalybes, Tabals, Tibareni, Macrones etc.) who were called Georgian ancestors by orthodox scholars without reserve, Melikishvili was more cautious. Indeed, groups of different origins could be covered by those collective names, more often than not. In particular, he no longer insisted that Phrygia was a Kartvelian state, and recognized that all the respective epigraphic materials were composed in the Phrygian, i.e. an Indo-European, language. Yet he did not give up hope that some Kartvelian tribes might account for part of its population. He acknowledged that the population of early Asia Minor and northern Mesopotamia included the Hurrians, Hatti, Hittites, Luwians, Armenians, i.e. was fairly heterogeneous in language and culture. At the same time, he did not deny that various east and west Georgian tribes lived there as well, having been assimilated by the Armenians and Greeks, later on (Melikishvili 1959: 69-85, 167, 175, 226-227, 301-303)⁵¹). As a result, he forgot his own reservations and represented Phrygia as a powerful “Mushki Kingdom” where the Mushki were identified with the Georgians. True, he remarked that the “Georgian tribes of the Mushki that made up the population of the Phrygian Kingdom were highly Hittitized by that time” (Melikishvili 1959: 109, 111-112, 226, 229).

He realized how difficult it was to discuss the problem of the Mushki, who were claimed by the Armenians as well⁵²). That is why first he denied any relationships between the early Mushki and Indo-Europeans. Second, he opposed the western Mushki of Asia Minor with the eastern Mushki of Mesopotamia. Third, he explained the persistent interest of Georgian scholars in the Mushki (Moschi) by the fact that the Moschi had played an outstanding role in the formation of the Georgian people. Indeed, Mtskheta, the first capital of the east Georgian state, got its name from them. Melikishvili pointed to the historical area of Speri in the Upper Çoroh River Valley as the earliest center of the Meschi-Kartlian tribes, which later made up the core of the Georgian people. He believed that the Moschi had moved eastwards from there and made the east Georgians familiar with the intellectual achievements of early Asia Minor and, possibly, with its political arrangements (Melikishvili 1959: 102, 105-112, 115, 229, 233-234; 1962: 319).

In fact, the Mushki were closely related to the Phrygians and had arrived in eastern Asia Minor from the west in the 12th century B.C. The Phrygians, who were also called Mushki in Assyrian, Urartian and early Israeli sources, were just arriving in Asia Minor across the straits at that time. The Moschi of the southeast Black Sea region were the bearers of the proto-Georgian language but had nothing to do with the Mushki. It was the latter, who moved to the Upper Euphrates River area by the 9th century B.C. and commenced the Armenization of the Urartian population. The Georgian ancestors never lived in this area (Diakonov 1983: 169-171). Yet, the Georgian historian, N. V. Khazaradze, still identifies the Mushki with the Kartvelian ancestors and argues that the Armenian ancestors arrived in Eastern Anatolia no earlier than the 670s – 660s B.C. (Khazaradze 1984). This is a surprise, since she herself refers to the inscriptions of the Mushki Kings made both in Luwian earlier and in old Phrygian later (Khazaradze 1978; 1988).

Concerning the North Caucasians, Melikishvili generously settled them throughout the highlands of Georgia and Transcaucasia in general, albeit he represented them as a backward population in respect to the Georgians who occupied the lowlands. He mentioned unsuccessful attempts by the Kartli Kings to assimilate the highlanders with the help of the Christian Church (Melikishvili 1959: 119-125, 129-130).

By the mid-1960s, Melikishvili had made his view about the Colchian territory and their ethnic affiliation more precise. He believed that they lived south of the Rioni River and were concentrated around the Çoroh River Valley until very late in the 1st Millennium B.C. He identified these Colchians with the “Georgian-Zan”, i.e. Mingrelian-Chan, tribes. He settled the Svans to the north of them up to Dioscurias (the contemporary Sukhum) and argued that they were encompassed by the Hellenistic name, the “Heniokhoi”. In his view, the Misimianoi who lived next to them must be identified as Svans as well. To prove that, he referred to local place names and put forward quite convincing linguistic arguments (Melikishvili 1966).

While discussing drastic changes of the ethnic names in northern Colchis at the dawn of the Christian era, Melikishvili linked this with mass tribal migrations. In

particular, he believed that the Abkhazian ancestors, Apsilae and Abasgoi, had crossed the great Caucasian mountain ridge by the beginning of the 2nd century A.D. Together with their relatives, they forced the earlier Georgian tribes out of the maritime region. A decline in political organization and barbarianization was the result (Melikishvili 1959: 88-90, 98-99, 307-308, 310, 364-365; 1973: 141-142). Albeit not as radical as Ingoroqva's theory, this approach still represented the Georgians as the first settlers in the territory of Abkhazia and introduced the idea of the "dual aboriginality" that received special political importance in the very late 1980s. The Abkhazians were also depicted as a less advanced population with respect to the Georgians. Naturally, none of this satisfied the Abkhazians.

Moreover, Melikishvili ascribed the initiative for the unification of Georgia to the Kartli state, as though the latter had greatly affected western Georgia as early as the 3rd – 2nd centuries B.C. It is worth analyzing his arguments for that reason. For example, he was alert to the fact that the Byzantines of the 3rd – 4th centuries A.D. had never mentioned any dominance of Kartli over Egrisi. Yet, he explained that by their tendentious stance and unwillingness to recognize reality. He intentionally skipped a detailed analysis of the unification of Georgia by the Abkhazian Kingdom. Ultimately, in his representation, this turned out to be a victory for the Kartli Kingdom, which involved western Georgia in its interaction sphere for centuries. This was a cultural triumph for the Georgian language and writing system over those of the Greeks, rather than a political victory by one of the local rulers. Melikishvili taught that the unification of Georgia had led to the Georgianization of the Abkhazian nobility and the formation of a uniform Georgian people. Yet, he included only Kartes, Mingrelians and Svans among these people; the Abkhazians were missing from the list (Melikishvili 1959: 131-135). Naturally, he avoided discussing the big language and cultural differences between the Kartes, Mingrelians and Svans. At the same time, there are reasons to believe that the Georgian language was alien to the Mingrelians and Svans except for their elite, until the 19th and, even, the very beginning of the 20th century (Hewitt 1995a).

Later on, obviously affected by Abkhazian political actions, Melikishvili represented the political developments in the 8th – 10th centuries more favorably to the Abkhazians. He criticized orthodox Georgian historiography for playing down the role of the Abkhazian Kingdom in the unification of Georgia and instead exaggerating the role of the south Georgian Principality of Tao-Klargeti (for example, see Dzhanashia 1991: 48; Berdzenishvili, Dzhavakhishvili, Dzhanashia 1950: 162-165, 169; Melikishvili 1959: 138-139; Berdzenishvili et al. 1962: 129-137). Melikishvili pointed out that, first, the name "King of the Abkhazians" always preceded "King of the Kartvelians" in the Georgian Kings' title. Second, the former Abkhazian capital of Kutatisi served as the capital of the united Georgian state for the whole century. The meaning of this went far beyond symbolic association with a former powerful Abkhazian Kingdom; the Kings of the united Georgia were willing to mobilize the Abkhazian power in order to suppress revolts and to keep conquering new territories. Melikishvili demonstrated convincingly that the

exaggeration of Tao-Klargeti's role and of the importance of its ruler, named David, was rooted in the old Georgian chronicles, whose authors were Kartli patriots and viewed western Georgia as a remote outlying land of no importance to the Georgian historical process. In fact, the process of Georgian unification up to its very end was entirely controlled by the Abkhazian Kingdom, which was no less powerful than Tao-Klargeti. In contrast with orthodox Georgian historiography, Melikishvili taught that the process developed against the plans of the Tao-Klargeti ruler rather than in favor of him. Indeed, Kartli was taken not by him but by the Abkhazian Dynasty, and the Tao-Klargeti Principality joined Byzantium through its ruler's will and was lost by Georgia forever (Melikishvili 1973: 133-138). All of this occurred long before the establishment of the Turkish state. Thus, the nationalist idea of the 19th – 20th centuries did not fit the intrigues of the medieval rulers! It did not correspond to the matrimonial policy of the Georgian Kings either. Indeed, it is no secret that the grandmother, mother and second husband of Queen Tamar were of Ossetian origin. David the Builder kept order in his state and waged wars of conquest with the help of the Turkic-speaking Qypchaqs (Voronov 1995).

Melikishvili's views in question were an outcome of his participation in a project carried out by the major Georgian historians in the 1950s and aimed at the composition of a new textbook on the history of Georgia. The textbook of the 1940s was considered less appropriate, as it had been closely linked with the Stalin-Beria political regime, and in 1954 the CC CPG ordered the Georgian historians to complete a new one. The latter came out in Georgian in 1958, and an extended version was published in Russian in 1962. The chapters that dealt with the earliest periods of Georgian history, up to the 3rd century B.C., were written by Melikishvili. The chapters on the late classical and early medieval times were completed by Professor V. D. Dondua. The hottest issue of the political unification of Georgia was analysed by the leading Georgian historian of that time, N. A. Berdzenishvili. It is of interest that the formation and political activity of the Abkhazian Kingdom were covered by earlier writings by Dzhanashia, inserted in the book. By the period in question, his view of the role of the Abkhazian Kingdom in Georgian history had become dogma, and nobody dared to interpret this issue in any other way. Finally, the most glorious time in the history of Georgia, between the unification and the Mongolian conquest, was depicted by Berdzenishvili as well (Berdzenishvili et al. 1962).

What, in particular, seemed most attractive to these authors on Georgian history? What did they attempt to tell the reader? Quite correctly, they distinguished between three distinct groups (Mingrelian-Chan, Kart and Svan) within the Kartvelian family of languages. Yet, they located their early speakers in the same territories where their descendants live nowadays – the Mingrelian-Chans in the southeast and eastern Black Sea regions, the Karts east of them, and the Svans in the highlands and, to some extent in the lowlands of western Georgia (Berdzenishvili et al. 1962: 27-28). Thus, they told the reader that Georgians occupied all the contemporary territory of Georgia from time immemorial. True, the

North Caucasians were mentioned as living there as well, but they were represented as close Georgian relatives, in accordance with the Iberian-Caucasian hypothesis.

Diauekhi and Qulhai were called the earliest Georgian polities (Berdzenishvili et al. 1962: 28-32). Thus, the Georgian state tradition was presented as having lasted 3,000 years, and the Georgians as the bearers of one of the earliest state traditions in the world⁵³). True, these polities were in decline by the 8th – 7th centuries B.C. However, in order to prove the continuity of the state tradition, Melikishvili constructed a powerful tribal alliance of “Saspire” in the Upper Çoroh River Valley and depicted it as Diauekhi’s heir. Simultaneously, he included in this alliance what remained of the Urartian tribes defeated by the Medes. This is how the “Saspire” came to be seen as enjoying the Urartian cultural heritage (Berdzenishvili et al. 1962: 33-34). Melikishvili localized the Colchian Kingdom (6th – 3rd centuries B.C.) in the Colchis lowlands and called it the successor of early Qulhai. While glorifying the power of this state, he intentionally played down the role of the classical Greek colonies, reducing it only to trade and craft activities (Berdzenishvili et al. 1962: 36-41).

Melikishvili related the emergence of a state in eastern Georgia in the 4th – 3rd centuries B.C. on the one hand with the strong influence of the Achaemenian state (which is correct. V. Sh.), and on the other hand, with the arrival of the Moschi from Asia Minor. It was from there that they brought the valuable Hittite political and cultural knowledge (Berdzenishvili et al. 1962: 43-45). The process of continuous integration was depicted as if it were inherent in the Georgian tribes. It was traced from the Bronze Age and especially to the time after the Kartli Kingdom was established. Melikishvili recognized the heterogeneous nature of the Kingdom’s population. Beside Georgians, it included the North Caucasians, Scythians, Hittites, Hurrians and Urartians, all of whom were successfully assimilated by the Georgians and shifted to speaking Georgian (Berdzenishvili et al. 1962: 50-51). While discussing the early Kartli state, the textbook referred extensively to rich archaeological materials from the Mtskheta region, where the Kings’ residence, the rulers’ mausoleums, magnificent noble tombs and the earliest traces of a writing system (so-called “Armazeen writing” that formed at the basis of the Aramaic alphabet in the 1st – 2nd centuries A.D.) were discovered in the late 1930s – 1940s. These proved the early development of the Georgian state (Berdzenishvili et al. 1962: 70-78. Also see Melikishvili 1959: 22)⁵⁴).

The adoption of Christianity in the 4th century A.D. was of crucial importance to the development of early Georgian culture. At that time, the original Georgian alphabet was introduced, theological manuscripts began to be translated into Georgian, and the Georgian literary tradition was born. It was emphasized in the textbook that the Georgian writing system was by no means invented by St. Mesrob Mashtots; instead, it was created on the basis of “Armazeen writing” (Berdzenishvili et al. 1962: 88-89. Cf. Berdzenishvili et al. 1950: 95)⁵⁵). In order to prove that, the authors referred to an hypothesis by G. V. Tsereteli, put forward at the very end of the 1940s during the wave of the state patriotism, which demanded

a search for the pre-Christian roots of the writing system (Tsereteli 1949)⁵⁶). In the meantime, later on it was demonstrated that, although Mesrob Mashtots could not be considered the founder of the Georgian alphabet, the latter could not have emerged without his influence (Perikhanian 1966: 127-133).

The situation in Western Georgia was more complicated, and archaeologists failed to discover firm evidence of the emergence of a local state there. Instead, the numerous historical documents permitted various interpretations. Nonetheless, the textbook emphasized that the rulers of medieval Lazica considered themselves the successors of the earlier Colchis Kings. Thus, one could suggest that an unbroken state tradition had existed there as well (Berdzenishvili et al. 1962: 79-80), despite the fact that the “Colchis Kingdom” had disintegrated by the 2nd century B.C., and a fairly different political pattern had emerged over the following centuries, having nothing to do with this Kingdom (Inadze 1953; Melikishvili 1959: 364-375). The Apsilae and the Abasgoi were mentioned among other local tribes of the late classical – early medieval periods, but the textbook avoided discussing their relationships with the contemporary Abkhazians. Instead, the authors pointed to the cultural rapprochement between Kartli and Egrisi in the 4th – 5th centuries, as though the Georgian writing system had forced out the Greek one in the west at that time (Berdzenishvili et al. 1962: 114)⁵⁷.

The Abkhazian Kingdom was called the “true Georgian Kingdom”, the firm position of Georgian there was emphasized, and the Kingdom’s name was explained by the “tribal affiliation of the ruling dynasty”. Yet, Abkhazian language and culture were ignored in this discussion. Naturally, the foreign policy of the Abkhazian Kingdom was characterized as “Georgian”. The political activities of the Tao-Klargeti principality were especially appreciated as being the last decisive step in the unification of Georgia (Berdzenishvili et al. 1962: 128-137). The textbook proudly exalted the outstanding deeds of David the Builder (the end of the 11th – beginning of the 12th centuries) who extended the Georgian borders and turned it into a multi-ethnic state. Yet, even here the authors failed to mention the Abkhazians. Instead, Georgia was represented as the savior of the Transcaucasian peoples from foreign subjugation and as the center of the Caucasian cultural world (Berdzenishvili et al. 1962: 169-170, 189). Moreover, Georgia of Queen Tamar’s time was claimed to be the most powerful state in the Near East. Indeed, it managed to establish the vassal Trebizond state in the south Black Sea region at that time, in order to resist the Seljuq expansion (Berdzenishvili et al. 1962: 203-206). The nickname of Queen Tamar’s son, “Lasha”, was mentioned, albeit without explanation.

Instead, at this time, the textbook touched upon the appearance of the South Ossetians in Georgia; they were represented as bloodthirsty barbarians who arranged continuous raids against peaceful Georgian villages, and massacred or forced out their residents. Despite the resistance of Georgian troops, they managed to secure the highland gorges and, from the 13th century, lived within the Imereti Kingdom (Berdzenishvili et al. 1962: 248-254, 283). The textbook got into the

Abkhazian issue only with respect to the events of the 17th century and maintained that Georgian dominated in their public life (Berdzenishvili et al. 1962: 312-313). It goes without saying that the Abkhazians treated this textbook as a relapse to Ingoroqva's concepts (Marykhuba 1994a: 125-126).

Thus, the following conception of the formation and early history of the Georgian people had developed in Georgian historiography by the 1960s. Now, the core of its formation was located in Transcaucasia, and only partly in the northern and probably central regions of Asia Minor. The latter was only considered important because the Mushki (Meschi) had come from there and brought Hittite achievements with them, as though the latter made the Georgians heirs of the earliest civilizations. Then, too, it was not easy for the Georgian authors to give up the idea that the inhabitants of Asia Minor who invented iron metallurgy were of Georgian origin. However, the archaeologists who had discovered the rich heritage of the Bronze Age and the Early Iron Age cultures strongly supported the autochthonist approach that was therefore appreciated by other academic fields. The main center of the Georgian state and culture was linked with Eastern Georgia, where early Christianity was rapidly Georgianized and made the basis of the future rich Georgian literary tradition. True, the Colchis Kingdom was also glorified as one of the early centers of the Georgian state tradition. Yet, in general western Georgia was granted only a subsidiary role, since it was in the ecclesiastical sphere of the Constantinople patriarchs in early medieval times, and the Georgian literary tradition commenced there only in the 10th century. This view emphasized three points: autochthonism, early baptism, and the kingdom of David the Builder and the Queen Tamar. It was taught in Georgian schools and served an important basis of the Georgian identity in the 1960s – 1980s. Archaeological finds played a significant role in confirming it, and even Georgian peasants kept them in their houses as proof that their ancestors lived in the Georgian territory from time immemorial (Dragadze 1988: 9-10, 40).

Interesting to note, the united Georgian Kingdom and the Orthodox Christian faith were among the most impressive symbols that were mobilized by Georgian nationalists, as they struggled for independence in 1989 – 1990. From the end of 1989, Georgia used every reason to emphasize its relationships with Christianity. The arrival of a copy of the Virgin Mary of Iberia icon from Greece to Tbilisi on October 9, 1989 turned into one of the first new public rituals and provoked widespread exaltation. After that time, the major Georgian newspapers used to publish photographs of Georgian medieval churches, which awoke historical memory among the Georgians, on the one hand, and strengthened their Christian identity, on the other hand. Side by side, secular rituals were cultivated that were closely linked with the idea of independence. On February 8, 1991, Georgia celebrated the anniversary of David the Builder's ascension to the throne, which proved to be a good reason for the Georgian mass media to disseminate material on the territorial unity and independence of Georgia. Next in turn was the famous Georgian poet, Shota Rustaveli, whose jubilee was celebrated on May 28, 1991.

The “Abkhazian Kingdom” was given its due for its role in the unification of Georgia, but its name was always put in quotation marks, and only Georgian heroes were acting on the historical stage. Certain Georgian authors managed to skip the Abkhazian Kingdom altogether, while discussing the issue of the unification of Georgia. Of all the architectural monuments in the territory of Abkhazia, the Georgian authors were most fascinated by the Besleti Bridge at Sukhumi, where a Georgian inscription from the 12th century had been discovered. Various Georgian authors focused their efforts on deriving Abkhazian place names from Georgian words. The Abkhazians had no place in this history, and even early Christian churches in Abkhazian territory were ascribed to the “Abkhazian school of Georgian architecture”. This view of Georgian history was disseminated among the public by popular books on the history of Georgian architecture (Garakanidze 1959; Amiranashvili 1963; Beridze 1967, 1974; Dzhanberidze, Tsitsishvili 1976), culture (Menabde 1968), seafaring (Beradze 1989), and military skill (Dzhordzhadze 1989). Some of the Georgian specialists in folk architectural traditions listed Abkhazians among the “west Georgian tribes” and went so far as to ascribe all the antiquities of Abkhazia from the Bronze Age dolmen culture to the early medieval Abasgoi and Apsilian groups to Georgian ancestors (Garakanidze 1959; Adamia 1968)⁵⁸. An image of the glorious history of early Georgia was thus imposed upon the public mind. This image was especially actively disseminated by the Georgian media in 1988-1989 (for example, see Tukhashvili 1989), when Georgians struggled mightily to attain independence.

CHAPTER 5

THE COLCHIAN MIRAGE

The idea of an early Colchis Kingdom, the earliest one in the east Black Sea region, excited Georgian scholars for a long time. They were even more stimulated by systematic archaeological studies there carried out from the 1950s (Inadze 1968: 6-38; Lordkipanidze 1979a). As we already know, this idea was shared by the Academician Dzhavakhishvili, and even more so by Melikishvili, who was attempting to mobilize new materials to illuminate the issue. Yet, the latter's views were somewhat inconsistent, since the thoughtful scholar in him was struggling with his Georgian patriot side. While touching upon the issues in question, Melikishvili introduced an important elaboration. He taught that one has to distinguish between, on the one hand, the pre-state formation of Qolhai/Qulhai that competed with Urartu and was memorialized by the romantic Argonaut myth, and on the other hand, the Colchis Kingdom, contemporary of the Greek colonies in the Black Sea region. The scholar acknowledged that there were no hard arguments in favor of the state status of the "Kingdom of Qulhai", but nonetheless, he granted it an important role in the Georgian political process and even provided it with a capital at the mouth of the Çoroh River (Melikishvili 1959: 185-186, 214-219)⁵⁹).

Melikishvili was even more fascinated with the early Colchis Kingdom and assumed that its capital, the legendary Aea, was situated on the Phasis (Rioni) River (Melikishvili 1959: 245; Berdzenishvili et al. 1962: 58). He went even further and maintained that the Colchis Kingdom was called "Egrisi" by its neighbors (Melikishvili 1959: 236)⁶⁰). In fact, there was no evidence of that at all, and he just transferred the early medieval pattern to an earlier period. Melikishvili also pointed to the silver coins, called "colchidki", a number of which were found in the east Black Sea region. He supposed that they were minted by the local inhabitants, and this had to be a firm argument in favor of the development of a class society there, and thus, a slave state, according to the Marxist view (Melikishvili 1959: 247-248; Berdzenishvili et al. 1962: 39-41).

Georgian authors attached great importance to Herodotus' (IV, 37) account of "four peoples" living in the Near East during his time: the Persians, Medes, Saspis and Colchians. They assume that, if the Persians and Medes enjoyed large states, then the other two peoples must, as well (Dzhanashia, Berdzenishvili 1945; Lordkipanidze 1979a: 52, 1991: 110-111). The advocates of this approach do not hesitate to entertain that conclusion, despite the fact that intensive archaeological

excavations in the east Black Sea region over decades still yields nothing there resembling large cities built by local inhabitants, ruler's residences, or temples which might be dated to the mid-1st Millennium B.C.

The only site where Georgian archaeologists were expecting to find the anticipated evidence of a flourishing Colchis Kingdom was a mound situated near the contemporary settlement of Vani in the Sulori Gorge in Imereti. Yet, the optimistic hopes of O. D. Lordkipanidze, director of many years' standing of the excavations in Vani, that he would find traces of early Colchis palaces and temples in the layers of the 6th – 5th centuries B.C. (Lordkipanidze 1976: 13) have never come to fruition. A large fortified settlement with magnificent stone temples was excavated in Vani, but it was dated to the Hellenistic period, when the local culture was greatly affected by the Greeks. Only scant and obscure remains of a wooden building that the archaeologists interpreted as a sanctuary dated to the period of the "flourishing Colchis Kingdom". At the same time, neither fortified buildings, nor palaces, nor even traces of dwellings were found there. Instead, rich burials and numerous gold and silver artifacts were discovered at Vani and some other contemporary sites (Itkhvisi and some other) that demonstrated a high level of social differentiation (Lordkipanidze 1978: 39 ff., 62, 69; 1979a: 60-66, 180-184; 1985; 1991: 112, 116, 118, 122-125; 1992). Yet, these burials alone cannot serve as a firm evidence in support of a state organization. That is why the optimistic view of Lordkipanidze, that the "administrative center of one of the Colchian *skeptoukiai*" (Lordkipanidze 1978: 69, 1991: 124-125) was located in Vani, should be considered premature. There are more reasons to agree with A. I. Boltunova that the flourishing of Vani was the result of close contacts with the classical Greek world rather than of an illusive highly centralized Colchis Kingdom (Boltunova 1963: 156-157).

All of this was disappointing; hence, Melikishvili's waver. On the one hand, he considered the Colchis Kingdom to be unstable formation, the development of which was hampered by strong Greek cultural influence as well as permanent raids by the highlanders (Melikishvili 1959: 115-116, 126). On the other hand, he emphasized in the same book that, quite to the contrary, the powerful Colchis Kingdom left no good grounds for Greek political activity, and, thus, Greek colonization was of a different nature there to that in the northern Black Sea region, and was limited to only traders' and craftsmen's activities. He pointed out that the population in local Greek cities was of mixed origins, and the share of indigenous inhabitants grew over time (Melikishvili 1959: 242, 244).

It is the latter concept, endowed with a heavy touch of patriotism that was appreciated by the Georgian specialists who developed it over the last few decades. One of them was Teimuraz K. Mikeladze (1925-1998) who, from the 1950s, occupied himself with studying the history of the Georgian tribes of northern Asia Minor and the southeast Black Sea region. Mikeladze was born to an elite Tbilisi family. In 1949, he graduated from the Historical Faculty of Tbilisi University and then was a post-graduate student in the Department of Archaeology and History of

the Ancient World. After graduation, he worked first at the Telavi State Pedagogical Institute, and then came back to Tbilisi in 1956 when he was hired by the prestigious Institute of History, Archaeology and Ethnography of the Georgian Academy of Sciences. In 1961-1966, he was the director of the archaeological excavations in the city of Poti and its vicinity, and, starting in 1971, was the permanent director of the Colchis archaeological project. He was one of the initiators of the founding, in 1977, of the Center for Archaeological Studies of the Academy of Sciences of the Georgian SSR in the Institute of History, Archaeology and Ethnography. The Center, directed by one of the leading Georgian archaeologists, Otar D. Lordkipanidze, turned out to be the main agency for the coordination of all the archaeological studies in the territory of Georgia (Lordkipanidze 1982: 8). Mikeladze was a deputy director of the Center from the very beginning. Later on, he was appointed a member of the Archaeological Committee of the Academy of Sciences of the Georgian SSR. He was highly respected in Georgia, and after he died, a Cabinet of Colchis Archaeology was established in his name in the Center for archaeological studies. Being a well known Georgian researcher, Mikeladze was heavily involved in teaching: he ran a permanent seminar called "Archaeological Talks" at the Center for Archaeological Studies and gave regular courses in Tbilisi University on the ethnogenesis of the Georgian tribes according to archaeological data (Lordkipanidze, Dzhorbenadze 2000). Thus, Georgian University students have been absorbing his ideas over the last few decades.

In his Candidate in History thesis, Mikeladze focused on the location of the early Georgian tribes (the same Chalibes, Tibareni, Macrones, Mossynoeci, Taochi etc.) who were mentioned by Xenophon (Mikeladze 1953), and his Doctor of History thesis dealt with early Colchis and its population (Mikeladze 1969, 1974). In fact, his Candidate in History thesis failed to make any substantial contribution to the orthodox Georgian historical approach (for example, see Dzhnanashia 1959a) but it contained a speculative idea about an allusion to the Georgian tribes in the Biblical story of Cain and Abel (Mikeladze 1953: 16. Also see Mikeladze 1969: 55-57). Later on, he argued that the Georgian ancestors, namely the Chaldeans and Tubals, graced humanity with the invention of iron metallurgy and enjoyed their kingdoms of Tabal and Halitu in Asia Minor (Mikeladze 1969: 46-64, 1974: 188-189). Following him, this idea was developed further by the archaeologist, D. A. Khakhutaishvili, who discovered a substantial center of early iron production in western Georgia. He had no doubt that the local craftsmen were of Chalybes origin, whom he identified with the Hatti, following the leading Soviet historical linguist, Viach. Vs. Ivanov. Yet Ivanov had established close relationships between the Hatti and the Abkhazian-Adyghe languages (Ivanov 1985). However, Khakhutaishvili assumed that the Chalybes were affiliated with the Colchis group of Kartvelian tribes (Khakhutaishvili 1988a, 1988b).

Mikeladze picked up Melikishvili's idea of the Mushki's (Moschi) identity with the Meschi, isolated them from the Thracians, considered them to be the

earliest Georgians, and believed that they moved to the east Black Sea region in the late 1st Millennium B.C. (Mikeladze 1969: 65-66, 1974). In accordance with the orthodox Georgian historical view, he derived the ancestors of the rest of the Georgians (Svans, Mingrelians) also from Asia Minor (Mikeladze 1974: 184). The aspiration to put the Moschi in classical Colchis has a long tradition in Georgian historiography. In the meantime, it was recently demonstrated that this approach has no good grounds: in fact, the Moschi still lived in the central regions of Asia Minor in the mid-1st Millennium B.C. and moved eastwards towards the southwest Georgia borderlands only by the end of the 1st Millennium B.C. (Khazaradze 1984, 1991).

In his Doctor of History thesis, Mikeladze based his views on the questionable idea, popular however among Soviet archaeologists, of the identity between an archaeological culture, on the one hand, and an ethnic and language entity, on the other hand (Mikeladze 1969: 3-6, 1974: 183. Also see Dzhaparidze 1980: 7). On this basis, he concluded there was already an ethnically homogeneous population in the Rioni and the Çoroh River Basins as far as the Upper Kura River in the late 2nd Millennium B.C. He identified this population with the Colchians, who were Kartified in the 4th – 3rd centuries B.C. (Mikeladze 1969: 26-27. Also see O. Lordkipanidze 1989: 185, 188-201, 1991: 93, 1992: 201-202). He argued that ethnic unity was reflected in the homogeneous Colchis archaeological culture. Moreover, he interpreted the Koban' culture of the central Caucasus as a derivative of the Colchis culture and identified it with some Georgian group (Mikeladze 1990: 75-76. See also O. Lordkipanidze 1991: 95). As was already noticed, this approach was shared by Dzhanashia. Melikishvili was of the same opinion (Melikishvili 1962: 321). At the same time, contemporary archaeologists point to important differences between the Koban' and the Colchis cultures and avoid their direct identification (for example, see Kozenkova 1996: 130-131).

Moreover, by the time Mikeladze was completing his Doctor of History thesis, it had already been established that the Colchis culture was by no means a homogeneous one, consisting instead of several local groups (Koridze 1965). What was the meaning of those groups: were they parts of one and the same ethnic community or did they reflect interactions between several distinct ethnic groups? Alternatively, did they perhaps reflect distinct social rather than ethnic divisions? Neither Mikeladze, nor his Georgian colleagues put these questions.

At the same time, the existence of a powerful tribal alliance made it possible to assume that a local state could be formed in the Colchis lowlands on its basis. Mikeladze dated its emergence from the late 2nd Millennium B.C., and began a new period of flourishing of the Colchis Kingdom from the 8th – 7th centuries B.C., although he acknowledged that there was no reliable evidence for that (Mikeladze 1969: 81-86, 1974: 190-191. Also see Khakhutaishvili 1955)⁶¹).

Other Georgian authors were not that radical; yet, they also believed that a local state flourished in the Colchis territory in the 6th – 3rd centuries B.C. They differed from each other only with respect to its chronological and territorial

framework. The issue of the location of its political center was still in great dispute (for example, see Lordkipanidze 1979a: 53-54). According to the most moderate approach, the political flourishing of the Colchis Kingdom was very brief, being restricted only to the 6th – 5th century B.C., after which it shrank to a small polity in the Rioni River Basin. In contrast to Melikishvili, the author of this hypothesis, M. P. Inadze, explained the weakness of that state with reference to internal causes – the vitality of the tribal structures and customs within its territory (Inadze 1968: 164, 1973: 168-169). She was on the mark, although she also exaggerated the greatness of the Colchis Kingdom. In fact, on the strength of the classical authors, one is able to talk of only a small polity in the Phasis River region (Braund 1994: 91). On these grounds, some scholars put into doubt any state organization at all among the Colchians before the last centuries of the 1st Millennium B.C. (Boltunova 1952: 178). Those who recognize its existence, depicted it as being based on a very loose political structure that lacked any strong king's authority (Discussion 1992; Tsetskheladze 1997: 113-114).

Regardless of differences among the Georgian researchers themselves, all of them shared Melikishvili's idea that the Colchian Kingdom hampered Greek colonization and restricted the autonomy of Greek settlements. In the view of the Georgian scholars, the Greeks had to arrange their colonies in already well established local towns and extensively used the services of local craftsmen. Furthermore, the density of the local rural population prevented the Greeks from developing their own farming economy, in contrast to their practice in other regions of colonization. The Georgian authors argued that there were no typical Greek city-states in the Colchis lowland (Inadze 1958, 1968: 143-144, 157-158, 1979; Lomouri 1960, 1962: 61-62; Lordkipanidze 1966: 63-64, 1979b, 1989: 256-272; Mikeladze 1969: 38-39, 1974: 187; Kaukhchishvili 1975: 496-497; Melikishvili, Lordkipanidze 1989: 230)⁶². With the aspiration of playing down the Greek role in the Black Sea region, a certain Georgian author went so far as to argue that the core of the Argonaut myth was based on the seafaring trips of Georgian sailors to Achaean Greece, rather than vice-versa. He wrote of extensive trade between Colchis and the northern and western Black Sea regions, while failing to mention that the Greeks rather than the Georgians were most engaged in this activity (Beradze 1989: 32, 66 ff.).

Written sources about the Colchis Kingdom were very scarce but the volume of archaeological data was growing every year. During the last half a century, archaeological materials have most attracted Georgian researchers (Lordkipanidze 1976: 12-13, 1979a: 11-29). What evidence did Georgian authors draw out of the archaeological materials in order to prove the highly restricted nature of Greek colonization in the east Black Sea region? Indeed, specialists acknowledged that it was hard to study this problem. The cities that were well known to the classical authors were still less explored; there were no data at all on the organization of city life; it was difficult to prove the idea of the mixed composition of the inhabitants of urban sites (Lordkipanidze 1979a: 119, 1979b: 191-195, 202; Kohl, Tsetskheladze

1995: 165; Tsetskhladze 1997: 101-110, 113-114).

Thus, one had to rely on indirect data. Georgian historians and archaeologists first emphasized that the Colchis seashore and, especially, the sites of future Greek cities had dense local populations long before the Greeks arrived. In particular, it was demonstrated that the local culture was replaced by the Greek one in some areas; in other areas they coexisted peacefully; cases were also known when Greek and local people were buried in the same graveyards (Lordkipanidze 1979a: 120-143, 1979b: 203-232; Inadze 1968: 97-106, 128-140, 1979: 284-287). It was also remarked that they worshipped some local Goddess, side by side with Apollo in Phasis (Lomouri 1960). The Georgian authors concluded that the arrival of the Greeks did not cause any radical changes in political, economic or cultural patterns. One could not observe any significant Hellenization of the local inhabitants; instead, the Greeks were affected by the local culture. All of this was explained with reference to some powerful centralized Colchis state (Lomouri 1960; Lordkipanidze 1979a: 144-148, 1979b: 233-237, 1992: 198)⁶³. They maintained that the name "Dioscurias" was Georgian rather than Greek, and, thus, the site was built up by the local inhabitants, and only Colchians lived there initially (Inadze 1968: 121; Mikeladze 1969: 43-44, 92, 1974: 187-188; Lordkipanidze 1979a: 133-134, 1979b: 221-222)⁶⁴.

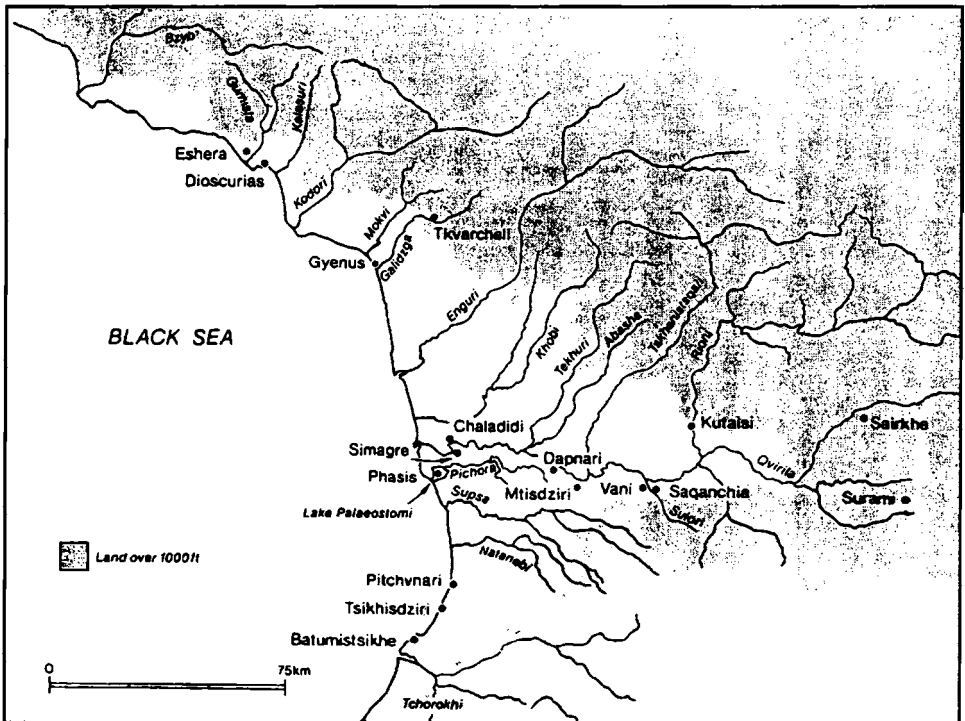
The idea about the origins of "colchidki" was highly disputable. Georgian scholars recognized that the prototype of these silver coins, which predominated in Colchis in classical times, was brought from the city of Miletus, which had a lion a symbol and worshipped Apollo (Dondua 1987: 17-20; Tsetskhladze 1997: 103-104). Yet, they argued that the coins might have been minted in some local political center, situated in the Rioni River Basin (Mikeladze 1974: 191) or somewhere else, and their symbolism might be rooted in local beliefs rather than in the Greek world alone (Kapanadze, Golenko 1957; Lordkipanidze 1979a: 176, 1979b: 250-255)⁶⁵.

At the same time, while playing down the role of Greek colonization and referring to the lack and obscure nature of archaeological evidence for it, Georgian authors failed to mention that there was even less reliable evidence of a Colchis Kingdom. There were no good reports of the latter in the classical literature (Boltunova 1952: 178, 1979a: 260; Kohl, Tsetskhladze 1995: 165). Those data that were available provided no firm grounds for any hypothesis of a well-established sovereign kingdom, and even suggested that the Colchian tribes were dependent on the Achaemenian Empire of the 6th – 5th centuries B.C. (Boltunova 1979b: 51; Yailenko 1982).

The available historical evidence of the Greek colonization, on the other hand, was by no means worthless⁶⁶. Indeed, the lion image on the "colchidki" was no accident; this was related to the Apollo cult, characteristic of Miletus, the mother polity where the early Greek colonists came from (Inadze 1968: 168, 1979: 288; Lordkipanidze 1979a: 174-175; Dondua 1987: 17-20; Tsetskhladze 1997: 104). Moreover, a silver bowl originating from Phasis was discovered in the Kuban' region in 1899. It served as firm evidence that Phasis had a temple to Apollo, as one

could expect of a city of the Miletian Greeks (Boltunova 1963: 156; Inadze 1968: 177; Kaukhchishvili 1975: 495-496; Lordkipanidze 1979a: 12, 124-125, 1979b: 209; Braund 1994: 97; Tsetskhladze 1997: 103). There are good reasons to assume that the “colchidki” began to be minted in Colchis under the influence of the Miletian Greeks. Certain authors supposed that they were minted in Phasis, a Greek city-state in the Rioni River mouth, as was stated by classical authors. This does not contradict the idea that in Phasis they worshipped some local Goddess as well as the traditional Greek gods (Boltunova 1963: 156-157; Braund 1994: 118-121; Kohl, Tsetskhladze 1995: 166). True, Pliny the Elder called Dioscurias a “city of the Colchians”, but this was at a time when it had lost its Greek nature. A somewhat different situation in southern Colchis proved to be less representative. Indeed, not many Greek colonists settled there, because of the high density of the local population (map 17). Still, Greek settlements were built up even in that area (Inadze 1968: 122; Braund 1994: 95; Kohl, Tsetskhladze 1995: 166; Tsetskhladze 1997: 109-110).

Yet, the bulk of the Greek settlers moved northward, where they found a more appropriate area for settlement at the Rioni River mouth. Here and further north, more backward tribes lived than those in the south. The Greeks settled either in unpopulated areas or in those that had been abandoned long before. The Greek settlements with their developed infrastructure were attractive to the indigenous



Map 17 Colchis in the Greek period (after Braund 1994)

inhabitants. That is why local settlements were very soon built in their vicinity. It was no accident that rapid economic and cultural growth in Cochis coincided with Greek colonization. Greek was spreading gradually through the region, and the Greek alphabet and customs were appreciated (Boltunova 1963: 155-157, 167, 1979a; Yailenko 1982; Inadze 1968: 180-183; G. Lordkipanidze 1978; Voronov 1979; Shamba 1979; Tsetsckhladze 1993: 16-21; Lakoba 1993: 40-54; Kohl, Tsetsckhladze 1995: 167-168; Tsetsckhladze 1998). Even one of the most ardent advocates of the Georgian approach, O. D. Lordkipanidze, had to agree with that (Lordkipanidze 1979a: 154-179, 190-196, 199-200, 207-210, 1979b: 256, 1992: 200 ff.). Moreover, a new hypothesis has been put forward recently that assumes that Greek colonization was restricted in the east Black Sea region by the factor of a natural environment that was less appropriate for traditional Greek farming, rather than by the illusory might of a Colchis Kingdom (Tsetsckhladze 1993: 13, 1997: 112-114).

As argued by Yu. N. Voronov, the hypothesis of a mighty Colchis Kingdom was highly stimulated during the Lavrenty Beria era. Meanwhile, according to the most reliable evidence from classical authors, the Colchians lived neither in the Phasis (contemporary Rioni) River Valley, nor north of it. Other tribes occupied those areas, which were called the Heniokhoi by the Greeks, but, unfortunately, there is no evidence at all of their language. As concerns the Colchis Kingdom itself, there are scholars who cast doubt upon its very existence. At the same time, downplaying the role of Greek colonization leads to a distorted view of both the cultural development and political evolution in the east Black Sea region. Yet, it was the Greek influence, as was demonstrated by Voronov, that played a major role in the formation of the early local political organization, the introduction of a writing system and the adoption of Christianity. In the meantime, the tendency to play down the Greek factor, dominating Georgian scholarship, caused intentional restriction of the related archaeological studies. As a professional archaeologist, Voronov was well aware what he was writing (Voronov 1989a, 1989b). At the same time, the idea of the political connotations of scholarly constructions was alien to Georgian historiography. In a pamphlet with the promising title, "Archaeology and Contemporaneity", O. D. Lordkipanidze wrote a lot about the history of archaeological studies as well as the cognitive role of archaeology, but failed to mention its ideological and socio-political functions (Lordkipanidze 1979c).

Actually, Georgian scholarship was unable to give up the idea of a mighty Colchis Kingdom. Indeed, that idea would permit them to construct the picture of continuous development of the Georgian political tradition in the east Black Sea region over a very long period, which, in Mikeladze's view, embraced 2,500 years. While ignoring serious breaks in this continuity, which were acknowledged by other Georgian authors (for example, see Melikishvili 1959), Mikeladze developed an illusory schema about Colchis state development that reproduced the chronology of the history of Ancient Egypt. He identified an Old state in the 12th – 6th centuries B.C., a Middle state in the 6th – 1st centuries B.C., and a New state in the

1st – 6th centuries A.D. (Mikeladze 1974). Another Georgian scholar introduced a new term for the period from the 7th century B.C. – 4th century A.D., as well. He called it the “Iberian-Colchis period”, which implied the notion of minor Greco-Roman impact on Colchis (for that, see Kohl, Tsetskhladze 1995: 163). The idea of a Colchis Kingdom enjoys a prestigious place in the fundamental academic publications of Georgian history (Melikishvili, Lordkipanidze 1989: 195, 205-208). It is unreservedly put forth by Georgian scholars as veritable truth (for example, see Lordkipanidze 1990: 6, 40). The formation of the “national material and intellectual culture of Georgia” in the pre-Christian period is closely linked with the Colchis Kingdom (Lordkipanidze 1984). The Colchis Kingdom is a favorable theme of Georgian fantasy writers as well (for example, see Sichinava 1991). Although this idea corresponded poorly to the historical reality, it laid the groundwork for the Georgian concept that the Georgian state emerged in the east Black Sea region two thousand years earlier than the Abkhazian state.

The development of an early Georgian state is one of the core ideas of the Georgian myth of the past, which is deeply rooted in the Georgian mind. When, for the first time in the Soviet period, they declared of the celebration of a Day of National State Restoration in Georgia in 1989, the newspaper, “Zaria Vostoka”, the main organ of the CC CPG, published a long article on the history of the Georgian state. The author of the article claimed that the Georgian state had emerged earlier than elsewhere in Europe. He referred to the Argonaut myth as evidence of “early Colchis”. He granted this the implausible date of the 15th century B.C. He went even further and maintained that there were historical proofs of its Georgian origin (Tukhashvili 1989).

Qulhai and Diauekhi, highlighted by the Academician Melikishvili, seemed to be dwarfs in comparison with this early “Georgian state”. Yet, in order to demonstrate political continuity, the author mentioned both these “states” and even recalled “semi-Georgian Urartu”. The author maintained that the “history of Georgia was consistent and almost continuous. The general line of Colchis culture was unbroken for 3,500 years. The political life of Iberia also had the long duration of 2,300 years. The Georgian language did not change much (although the Georgian writing system was reformed several times in the early 1st Millennium A.D., and contemporary Georgians cannot read early manuscripts without special training! V. Sh.), and this was also true of their religion (although Christianity was introduced in the 4th century, and entirely replaced the earlier belief system! V. Sh.) and national character (what can be the meaning of this notion in early medieval times or earlier? V. Sh.)”. The author pointed to the very dynamic historical processes that caused the declines of empires, the disappearance of early peoples, language replacement, etc. Yet he claimed “all the attributes of a nation and a national state were immutable in Georgia”. All of this manifests the very essence of the Georgian national myth, which Georgians are unable to give up. In the meantime, the development of independent Abkhazia would be a serious challenge to this myth, and it is no accident that the author (Tukhashvili 1989) skipped over the Abkhazian

Kingdom.

The idea of the early Colchians and their glorious state dominates Georgian politicians. In his report of the events in Georgia in the early 1990s, B. Gugushvili, former Prime Minister of the Gamsakhurdia government and a member of the Board of Ministers of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria, identified the Colchians with the direct descendants of the Svans and Mingrelians. He based himself on the aforementioned idea of the “dual aboriginality” and argued that the Abkhazians lived only in the highlands and hilly flanks and that the Mingrelians always occupied the seashore between the Rioni River and the city of Sochi. He argued that the Migrelians who lived in Abkhazia called themselves the “Abkhazians”, that the bulk of the Abkhazians were close to the Migrelians in terms of culture, were fluent in Mingrelian and also originated from the Colchians. In his view, Stalin’s regime persecuted both the Georgians and the Abkhazians in order to encourage separatism (sic! V. Sh.) and to provoke ethnic conflicts. He claimed equal human rights for them; yet, he disliked the existence of the Abkhazian republic, and he treated its establishment in 1921 as a crime against Georgia (Gugushvili 1997: 93-96).

The very name the “Qolha” proved to be important to contemporary Georgians, as well. In 1990, a Black Sea commercial consortium embracing several major Georgian industrial enterprises appropriated it. Its goal was to develop the infrastructure in the coastal regions between Batumi and Gagra.

In 2000, Georgia was planning to celebrate the 3,000th anniversary of the Georgian state, and the Georgian parliament assigned a special budget for that. This means that the idea of the Colchis Kingdom is appreciated by contemporary Georgian politicians, who use it in the formation of the contemporary Georgian identity (for example, see Chabukiani 1995: 15). Thus, the Argonaut myth, which has occupied a firm position in Georgian social memory for a long time, proved to be much stronger than all the reasoning of the Georgian scholars about early Phrygia, Diauekhi and other early political formations by “early Georgian tribes”. Yet, there are no good grounds for the identification of the characters in the myth with Georgians (for that, see Colarusso 1995: 76).

Recently, Georgians have enjoyed a new point for pride that is also closely connected with the recent achievements of Georgian archaeologists. Since the 1970s, Azerbaijan has enjoyed glorification as the region where the earliest traces of humans (a mandible of *Pithecanthropus* at the cave of Azykh, Nagorny Karabagh) have been discovered in the territory of the USSR. It had to give up this place to Georgia in the very late 1990s. At that time, Georgian archaeologists discovered the remains of *Homo erectus*, dating to 1,700,000 years ago. An exhibition was arranged in Tbilisi in mid-October 2000 to show the “earliest European” to the entire world. Thus, Georgia manifested its aspiration to identify itself with Europe and to enter the European community. The special role of the exhibition was emphasized by a visit by the Georgian president, E. A. Shevardnadze.

CHAPTER 6

TURCHANINOV'S "DISCOVERY"

At the time when Georgian scholars were building up the myth of the earliest Georgian state in Colchis, an event occurred that might undermine the very basis of the Georgian view of Georgian history. In contrast, it encouraged the Abkhazians to develop their own view of the past that was quite different from the Georgian one. In 1960, a stone with enigmatic signs was found in a small village near Maikop (Republic of Adygheia). A stone was discovered by a native resident while he was working his plot of land. This man's son showed the stone to his schoolteacher, and the latter passed it on to the Adygheian Research Institute. The stone would have lain forever in the Institute's warehouse with other archaeological materials, if it had not been shown in early 1963 to the ethnographer, L. I. Lavrov, a well-known specialist in Caucasian epigraphy. He brought the stone to Leningrad and showed it to the major Soviet experts in early writing systems. The specialists agreed unanimously that the stone represented some unknown writing system, but the inscription was too short to be deciphered without any additional materials for comparison.

Professor G. F. Turchaninov of the Leningrad Branch of the Institute of Linguistic Studies of the USSR Academy of Sciences took responsibility for deciphering it. He compared the inscription with pseudo-hieroglyphic texts from Byblos, and related some signs to Hittite hieroglyphics. Referring to paleography, he dated the inscription to the 13th – 12th centuries B.C. and related it to the Colchians, who once lived in the northwestern Caucasus. What was most surprising was that, in Turchaninov's view, the inscription was easily read in Abkhazian. He argued that it told of the city of Aea, situated somewhere on the flanks of some hills, where the local ruler had his residence. Turchaninov related the inscription to the Argonaut myth, speculated on possible contacts between the early Abkhazians and the Phoenicians and Hittites, and went so far as to identify the historical Sinds, who lived on the Taman' peninsula in the classical period, with the Abkhazians. Concerning the early city mentioned in the inscription, he supposed that one should search for it in the Belaia River Valley in the territory of Adygheia (Turchaninov 1965a, 1966, 1971: 11-33). Providing this proved true, it demanded radical revision of early Colchis history: first, the Colchians turned to be Abkhazians; second, their lands extended far northward – up to the Taman' peninsula and the Kuban' River; third, they already had their own state and writing system in the Late Bronze Age.

The Colchis Kingdom was turning out to be a real historical fact; yet, not the one that the Georgian scholars were dreaming of. It looked like it was going to be the early Abkhazian Kingdom.

Turchaninov's hypothesis created a sensation. It was picked up by both the local and central media: they read of the discovery of the earliest writing system to be found in the territory of the USSR that turned out to be Abkhazian. The borders of the "earliest Abkhazian Kingdom" reaching as far as the hilly flanks of the northwestern Caucasus also attracted a lot of attention (Pachulia 1963a, 1963b; Informatsiia 1965). In 1963, Turchaninov gave a lecture on his discovery to a special meeting of the Scholarly Council of the Abkhazian Institute of Language, Literature and History in Sukhumi, where his conclusions were acknowledged as an "important scholarly discovery" (Pachulia 1963a). In December 1963, the Moscow "Literaturnaia Gazeta" addressed well-known Soviet scholars for their comments. One of them (professor I. N. Vinnikov) was critical of Turchaninov's views and recommended that readers should be cautious. Some others (the Academicians I. I. Meshchaninov and V. V. Struve) were more optimistic, although they thought that Turchaninov's reading of the inscription should be checked by other specialists in Abkhazian. Abkhazian authors (G. Dzidzaria, Sh. Inal-Ipa, M. Trapsh) maintained that the text was fairly comprehensible to Abkhazians and had no doubt that the use of Abkhazian covered a much more extensive territory in the past than it does nowadays. Finally, the Adygheian scholar, the Director of the Adygheian Research Institute, M. Autlev, was not convinced that the inscription should be ascribed to the Abkhazians alone and thought that one should speak of common Abkhazian-Adyghe ancestors (Maikopskaia nakhodka 1963).

At the meantime, a joint team of Adygheian and Abkhazian archaeologists carried out a study of the area where the stone had been found. The result of their study was frustrating to those who were so very excited about the sensational information about the "earliest writing system". It was established that an early Maeotian settlement had once flourished in the area of the finding, and the stone could not be dated earlier than the last third of the 3rd century B.C. An Adygheian archaeologist emphasized that this was an "early Adyghe" settlement (Autlev 1965; 1966. Also see Pachulia 1963a).

Discussions in scholarly publications evoked even more skepticism. A leading specialist in Caucasian archaeology, Ye. I. Krupnov, pointed out that our knowledge of the Colchis archaeological culture of the western Caucasus provided no grounds at all for any hypothesis about an early local state in the late 2nd Millennium B.C. There were even fewer reasons to assume that the local tribes enjoyed a writing system particularly in Abkhazian, in prehistoric times. After he had taken part in the exploration of the area of the finding, he confirmed that the stone should be dated no earlier than the 4th – 3rd centuries B.C. Moreover, he mentioned that certain Abkhazian specialists acknowledged that they believed Turchaninov's promising constructions too hasty (Krupnov 1964, 1965).

The leading Soviet specialist in the dead languages of the Near East, I. M.

Diakonov, pointed to Turchaninov's methodological faults and implausible conclusions. In his view, the time was still not ripe for deciphering of the Maikop Stone (Diakonov 1966). L. I. Lavrov also remarked that Turchaninov's approach was generally unsophisticated, which had already led to earlier errors. He demonstrated that Turchaninov's hypothesis did not correspond to any other data of northwestern Caucasian history at hand (Lavrov 1966: 18, 1967).

These responses did not affect Turchaninov at all, and he did not correct any of his conclusions. Instead, he turned his efforts to accusing his opponents of being incompetent. He stretched some points and distorted others' views. He interpreted the cautious and evasive reviews of certain specialists as though they supported him. He also argued that the stone in question could have been brought to the area where it was found from some earlier site. He pointed to the archaeologists' views that a much more extensive area had been occupied by the Adyghe tribes in the Early Iron Age. In his mind, this might confirm his conclusions. He implausibly identified the Adyghe with the Abkhazians. He recalled Milikishvili's hypothesis about the Qulhai state but failed to mention that Melikishvili located the latter in a narrow area of the southeastern Black Sea region. In order to confirm his approach, Turchaninov referred to the new finding of a similar inscription in Sukhumi, where it was dated to the 2nd century B.C., i.e. precisely like the Maeotian settlement where the earlier inscription was found. This did not cause him to change his initial chronological estimate (Turchaninov 1965b, 1966, 1971: 3-8). Moreover, while discussing the area of the Maikop Stone finding in his later book, Turchaninov made no reference neither to the Maeotian nature of the local proto-historic settlement, nor to its archaeological date (Turchaninov 1971: 31). Instead, he put forward a new sensational idea. He argued that, while analyzing the Sukhumi inscription, he had found the Abkhazian term "Akwa" as well as the name of the Abkhazian settlement of Lykhny. Although, in his own chronological estimates, the two findings were separated by a period of 1,000 years, he convinced the reader that there were no radical changes neither in the Abkhazian language nor in the boundaries of the territory occupied by the Abkhazian ancestors during all this time (Turchaninov 1971: 33-42).

Fascinated with all these constructions, Turchaninov went so far as to attempt to read proto-Byblos texts in Abkhazian. He actually managed to do it! The latter by no means caused him to doubt his methodology. On the contrary, it allowed him to conclude that the Abkhazian writing system had developed in the 3rd Millennium B.C. He claimed that early Abkhazian had affected the formation of the Phoenician writing system (Turchaninov 1971: 115-116). All of this sounded very suspicious to the specialists (for example, see G. Lordkipanidze 1978: 133-136), and, apparently, it is no accident that Turchaninov's book was not reviewed at all. At the same time, as Turchaninov expected, his ideas were greatly appreciated by certain Abkhazian authors, who cited them (Shakryl 1965: 220; Inal-Ipa 1964: 8, 1965: 86-87, 1976: 125; Gogua 1989: 158).

A new book on the early writing systems of the Caucasus and Europe, that

Turchaninov promised to publish, never came out for several reasons. First, the Division of Literature and Language of the USSR Academy of Sciences received several negative reviews of it, written by professional linguists in the very early 1980s. One of them was the well-known Georgian linguist T. V. Gamkrelidze, who reasonably accused the author of using the facts of contemporary language erroneously in order to decipher early writings, and of neglecting to use the very sophisticated reconstruction methodology developed by contemporary historical linguists (Gamkrelidze 1989). Another Georgian scholar demonstrated that the Sukhumi plate was actually a fragment of Roman brick, which could not be dated earlier than the 1st century A.D. (G. Lordkipanidze 1978: 134-135). Second, and even more important, was that the book was to be published in what were troubled years in Abkhazia. They decided in the Leningrad Branch of the "Nauka" Publishing House that the publication of this book during the time of turmoil, in 1977 – 1978, would exacerbate Georgian-Abkhazian tensions. Thus, the publication of the book was delayed forever (for that, see Marykhuba 1994a: 220).

While objecting to the critical remarks of the specialists, Turchaninov recognized the social importance of his constructions. He wrote: "When a new written source is interpreted or published, be it an Abkhazian, Ossetian or Circassian (Adyghe) one, not only specialists are interested in it, but all local intellectuals irrespective of their professions". Indeed, a "writing system as an indicator of ethnic maturity serves one of the most important features of a people's cultural history" (Turchaninov 1971: 3). There is no doubt that Turchaninov's interpretation of the findings in question was greatly affected by the ethno-political situation in Abkhazia. While he was a faithful student of the Academician Marr, he did his best to build up a great past for the Abkhazians and to help them in their struggle against Georgian historiography. As we shall see further on, all of this affected both the Abkhazian view of their early past and their collective self-awareness in general. It is no accident that one of the last reports of Turchaninov's discoveries was published by the Abkhazian media in February 1989 (Turchaninov 1989), i.e. when Georgian-Abkhazian tensions were about at their climax.

CHAPTER 7

THE ABKHAZIANS IN A STRUGGLE FOR THE “RIGHT” PAST

Abkhazian scholarship only developed after World War II. Before the revolution, only enthusiastic amateur authors were interested in the history and ethnography of Abkhazia. A small archaeological museum was organized at the highlanders' school in Sukhum before the Russian-Turkish war of 1876-1877, but it was removed during a period of war and disappeared. At the same time, it would be incorrect to maintain that nobody was interested in Abkhazian antiquities in the Russian Empire. However, this interest was of a very limited nature – Christian relics and to a lesser extent the ruins of classical cities were most studied. The Abkhazians themselves were not involved in that (Storozhev 1925).

In the 1920s, due to the rapid development of regional studies, the number of enthusiasts increased greatly, but their training was still very poor. In 1922, those involved in regional studies established the Abkhazian Scientific Society (ASS) in Sukhum, which embraced everybody who was fond of Abkhazian culture. Many outstanding Abkhazians were among its members, from high officials (N. Lakoba) to cultural activists and teachers (D. Gulia, S. Chanba, S. Ashkhatsava, S. Basaria etc.) (Pachulia 1976: 32). At the same time, although protection of historical monuments was one of its goals, the ASS had no special division focused on history and archaeology. Obviously, the Division of Geography and Ethnography was responsible for these fields. Nonetheless, despite apparent interest in the past, its studies were poorly organized, and no lectures given in the ASS in 1924 discussed historical issues.

Yet, the ASS had managed to arrange the very successful 1st Congress of Activists in the Regional Study of the Black Sea region and western Caucasus, held in Sukhum in September 1924. This was the largest of all the provincial congresses of this sort that took place in 1924. There was a large number of participants (188 people), and the Congress was chaired by the Academician Marr himself. Marr's participation was great luck for the Abkhazians. He focused all his energy on Abkhazian studies (Marr 1938), and the Academy of Abkhazian Language and Culture was founded under his initiative in 1925. In 1931, the Institute of Abkhazian Culture (later renamed the Abkhazian Research Institute) was established at the basis of the ASS. In 1924, the Abkhazian State Museum was formed in Sukhum, which had a Division of History and Archaeology. All of these

agencies were actively collecting primary data on Abkhazian history, archaeology and ethnography, although most of these materials were unprocessed and the local researchers avoided making wide generalizations (Inal-Ipa 1965: 13-18, 23-24).

In fact, one is able to talk of an Abkhazian historical school only after the period that commenced in the early 1950s. Two Abkhazian scholars were heavily involved in the study of early Abkhazian history in the 1950s – 1970s. They were the historian, Z. V. Anchabadze, and the ethnographer, Sh. D. Inal-Ipa. Z. V. Anchabadze (1920-1984) was, perhaps, the most remarkable Abkhazian historian of the late 20th century. He was born in Gagra, to a family that was closely related to certain well-known Georgian families. His career developed smoothly. After graduation from the Sukhum State Pedagogical Institute, he was a postgraduate student at the Institute of History, Archaeology and Ethnography of the Georgian Academy of Sciences, where the leading Georgian scholars, S. Dzhanashia and N. Berdzenishvili, were among his tutors. When Abkhazia was suffering in the 1940s, he managed to defend his Candidate in History thesis, which was focused on such hot and less-known issue as “Mingrelia and Abkhazia in the 17th century” (1948). In 1960, he defended his Doctor of History thesis on Abkhazian medieval history. Anchabadze was on good terms with Georgian authorities, his academic career developed quite successfully, and he rapidly climbed the administrative ladder. From 1956 – 1958, he headed the Department of History and Ethnography at the Abkhazian Research Institute of History, Language and Literature (ARIHLL), from 1958 – 1973 he was the Chairman of the Department on the Caucasian Highlanders at the Institute of History at the Georgian Academy of Sciences. From 1973 he was the Rector of the Sukhumi State Pedagogical Institute. In 1979, he was elected a corresponding member of the Academy of Sciences of the Georgian SSR (Togoshvili 1988: 3-9).

The aforementioned review of Ingoroqva's book was Anchabadze's first publication on the early history of Abkhazia (Anchabadze 1956). After that, he never failed to express his interest in early Abkhazia and the history of the Abkhazian people, and he published several books on that subject (Anchabadze 1959, 1964, 1976). His concept of Abkhazians' origins, their early medieval history and the historic role of the Abkhazian Kingdom was as follows.

In Anchabadze's view, two groups played major roles in the formation of the Abkhazian people, a local group and a group of newcomers. While thoroughly discussing the archaeological data from Abkhazia and Colchis in general, Anchabadze demonstrated the long continuity of cultural development and the richness of the local culture. In his view, this was evidence that Abkhazia was populated from the earliest time and that a fairly stable ethno-cultural entity had emerged there. It was the latter that were the basis of the formation of the Abkhazian people. At the same time, he pointed to the important role of certain migrants from Asia Minor (they were related to the Kashka and Abeshla of the Assyrian sources) who mixed with the local inhabitants in the 2nd Millennium B.C. and passed to them their own language and higher culture (Anchabadze 1964: 120-

128, 1976: 19-23; Anchabadze et al. 1986: 18-21). Thus, in Anchabadze's concept, the Abkhazians acquired the status of being the earliest population in Colchis, on the one hand, and became heirs of the cultural traditions of the Near Eastern early civilizations, on the other⁶⁷).

Concerning later periods, Anchabadze's views were also in some points different from those of the major Georgian historians. First, he had no doubt that such early medieval groups as the Abasgoi, Apsilae, Misimianoï and Sanigai (he identified them with the Heniokhoi) could be identified with the Abkhazian ancestors (Anchabadze 1959: 6-22, 1964: 136-137, 169-179, 1976: 30-39, 44-45; Anchabadze 1986: 27-28)⁶⁸). With reference to early cultural continuity, he denied that the Abkhazian ancestors had arrived in Colchis only in the first centuries A.D. and insisted that they had to be considered an indigenous population par excellence. He was especially struck by the archaeological excavations in Tsebel'da, where an archaeological culture of local origin was discovered. He suggested that it should be called the "Apsilae culture", since the territory of the historical Apsilae was located there by classical authors. At the same time, he emphasized that the northwestern movement of the Mingrelian-Chan tribes was observed in the first centuries A.D., when they began to settle in southern Abkhazia (Anchabadze 1964: 181-183, 1976: 39-41; Gunba 1989a: 143; Inal-Ipa 1992: 84-86)⁶⁹).

Second, he objected to the representation of the early Abkhazian ancestors as backward tribes and maintained that they were a socially differentiated community to the extent that an early class society had emerged among them. That is why he preferred to call them small nations (*narodnosti*) rather than tribes, and taught that they represented separate autonomous communities ruled by their own kings, although they were somewhat dependent on either Lazica or Byzantium (Anchabadze 1959: 22, 29-33, 1964: 183, 202-204, 1976: 46; Anchabadze et al. 1986: 38).

Third, he believed that a uniform Abkhazian people had formed from all four of the aforementioned groups led by the Abasgoi, who had built up a large and strong principality by the mid-8th century. Yet, the language of these people had formed on the foundation of the Apsilian dialect (Anchabadze 1959: 62-69, 1976: 48-52; Anchabadze et al. 1986: 42; Dzidzaria 1960: 63-64).

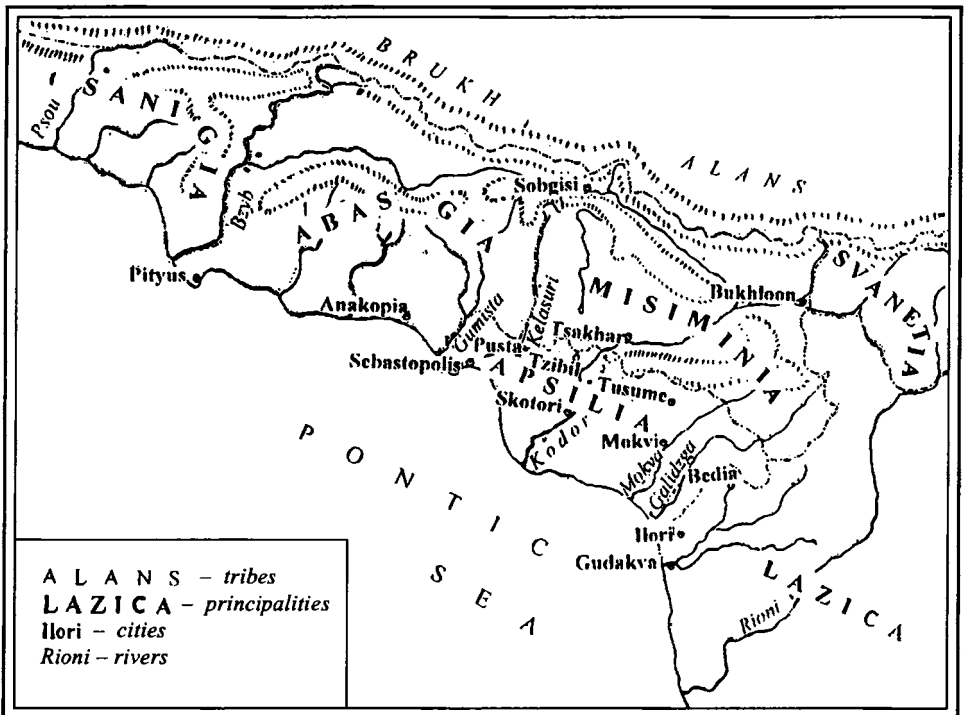
Fourth, Anchabadze objected to Ingoroqva's view that the first Abkhazian kings were Laz (i.e. Georgian) in origin. Anchabadze claimed that they were ethnic Abkhazians (Anchabadze 1959: 78-80).

Fifth, he pointed out that, from the very beginning, the Abkhazian Kingdom was heterogeneous in its ethnic composition. Besides the Abkhazians, it included the Laz (Mingrelians), Kartes, and Adyghes. The Kartvelians dominated there numerically; they were also more advanced in cultural terms. That is why the Georgian language finally won out and the Georgian writing system spread widely within the Kingdom. All of this had occurred by the early 9th century. Yet, even after the Abkhazian Kingdom emerged and up to the mid-9th century, the Abkhazian Church was within the ecclesiastical sphere of the Constantinople

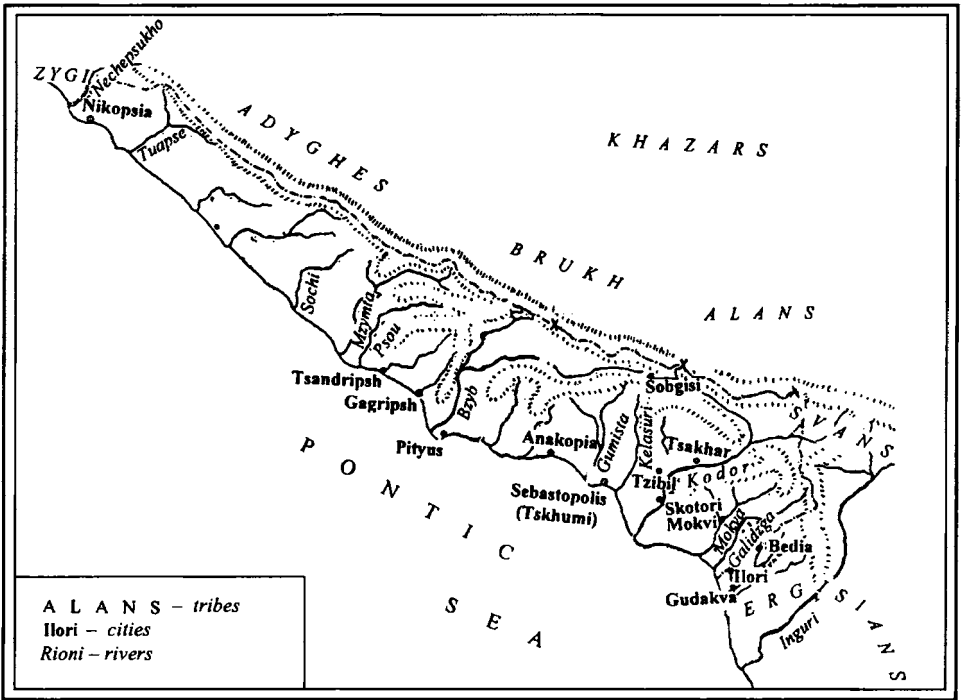
patriarch. A merger of the eastern and western Georgian Churches commenced only after this date (Anchabadze 1959: 105-108, 146-151, 1976: 53).

Sixth, following Dzhanashia, Anchabadze demonstrated that the meaning of the terms “Abkhazia” and the “Abkhazians” had changed over time. After a unified Abkhazian principality emerged in the 730s – 740s A.D., all its territory was called “Abasgia”, and its population was called the “Abkhazians” (maps 18-19). Later on, after the Abkhazian Kingdom was established in the 870s, the term “Abkhazia” was applied to all its territory, including western Georgia (map 20). Moreover, after that time, the term “Abkhazians” was used for all of the Kingdom’s population, rather than to refer only to the ethnic Abkhazians. Thus, Anchabadze shared the Georgian view of the “all-Georgian line of the cultural and religious policy of the Abkhazian Kingdom” (Anchabadze 1959: 117-118, 152-153, 1976: 54-55, 57-58; Anchabadze et al. 1986: 46). He warned against the exaggeration of the Abkhazians’ role in the Abkhazian Kingdom and seemed to agree with Dzhanashia, who called the Abkhazian Kingdom a “west Georgian formation” (Anchabadze 1959: 157-159). At the same time, it seemed important to him to emphasize that the Abkhazians did not merge with the Georgians even during the period of the united Georgian state, let alone during other historical periods (Anchabadze 1976: 61-63).

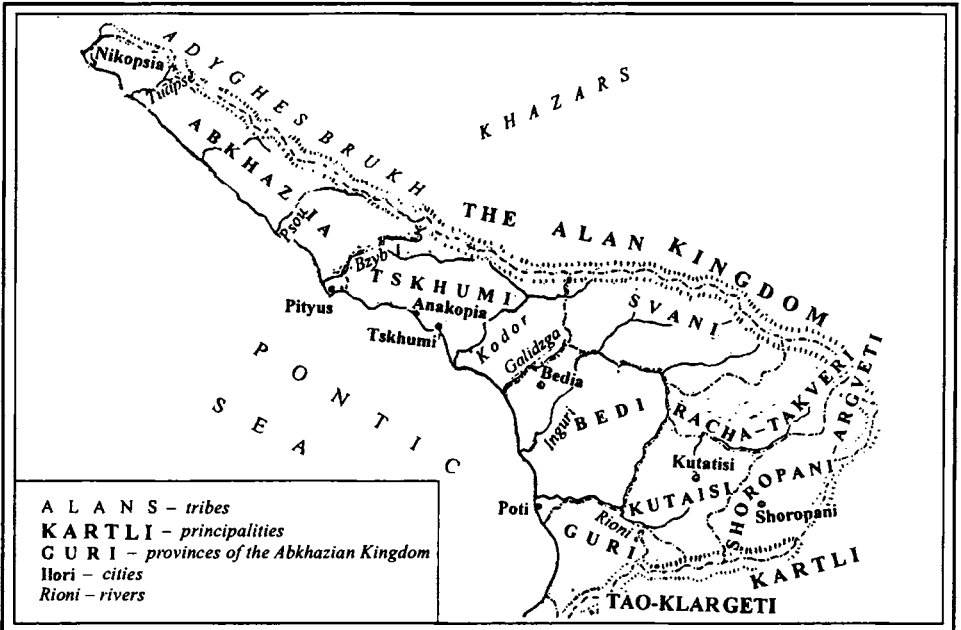
To put it differently, Anchabadze did his best to find a compromise approach that suited both the Georgians and the Abkhazians. Indeed, he was completing his



Map 18 Abkhazia in the 7th – 8th centuries A.D. (after Anchabadze 1959)



Map 19 The Abkhazian principality in the 8th century A.D. (after Anchabadze 1959)



Map 20 The Abkhazian Kingdom in the 9th century A.D. (after Anchabadze 1959)

first book at the time of the scandal caused by discussion of Ingoroqva's concept. The period that followed was distinguished by tense Georgian-Abkhazian relationships. It is also possible that Anchabadze was under heavy Georgian pressure. This is demonstrated by the fact that he did not restrict himself only to critical remarks with respect to Ingoroqva's book; where it was possible, he referred positively to its ideas. No other Abkhazian scholar had done that. It is also worth noting that all his life Anchabadze was an advocate of the Iberian-Caucasian linguistic and "ethnic" family (Anchabadze 1964: 122, 1976: 17-18; Anchabadze et al. 1986: 19).

The life of Sh. D. Inal-Ipa (1916-1996) was much harder than that of Anchabadze. Born to an Abkhazian noble family, with a brother who was repressed by Stalin, he had to hide his origins for a long time. He had no future in Abkhazia of the very late 1930s, and he went to Moscow, where he managed to enter the Historical Faculty of the Moscow State Pedagogical Institute. After having received good training as an historian in Moscow, he became a postgraduate student in the Institute of History, Archaeology and Ethnography at the Georgian Academy of Sciences under the supervision of the well-known Georgian ethnographer, G. S. Chitaia. After that time, he was always interested in the history and culture of the Abkhazian people. His scholarly career developed within the ARIHLL, which he was affiliated with from 1949, with a focus on the traditional Abkhazian culture and the Abkhazian people's origins. His Doctor of History thesis (1962) was based on his seminal book, "The Abkhazians", which is still the only scholarly work providing a holistic approach to the history of the Abkhazians and their traditional way of life and culture. Inal-Ipa's ethnographic publications were never addressed to the academic community alone, they were continuously discussed by the general public and affected Abkhazian national self-awareness a great deal. Indeed, they emphasized the authenticity of the Abkhazian people, which was a powerful argument in favor of their right to independent development. Moreover, Inal-Ipa was active in the writing of appeals to the authorities of the USSR in defense of the Abkhazian language and culture as well as for upgrading the political status of Abkhazia. Georgian officials were by no means happy with that, and publication of his chief books on the early history of the Abkhazian people brought about new problems, rather than satisfaction to their author (Anchabadze, Reshetov 1996).

Indeed, in contrast to cautious Anchabadze, Inal-Ipa was more inclined to develop an Abkhaziocentric view. As has been noted, the book, "The Abkhazians (historical-ethnographic essays)" (1965) was his most fundamental work, which focused on a comprehensive discussion of all aspects of traditional Abkhazian culture. In this book, he did not skip the issue of the origins of the Abkhazians and their early history. These were extensively discussed in several chapters. The first time he presented his views about the early history of the Abkhazian people, it was a highly condensed version given at the VII International Congress of the Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences held in Moscow in 1964 (Inal-Ipa 1964). Later on, he returned to this theme in his book, "The Issues of the

Ethnocultural History of the Abkhazians” (Inal-Ipa 1976). Although he did not fail to address all the required compliments to Georgian historiography, he was not satisfied with many of its points, and complained that Abkhazia was neglected in Georgian textbooks of history to the extent that it was altogether missing in certain important chapters. He also objected to certain of Melikishvili’s hypotheses on the composition of the population in early Colchis and, in particular, to the picture of the Abkhazian ancestors’ arrival from over the Caucasian mountain ridge during the first centuries A.D. He was even less satisfied with the view, common in Georgian historiography, that all the early tribes of the east Black Sea region had to be identified with Georgian ancestors which, in his view, entirely ignored the Abkhazian presence within the region (Inal-Ipa 1965: 22-23, 1976: 44-50, 222-225).

While developing his concepts on the formation and early history of the Abkhazian people, Inal-Ipa emphasized the following points. First, the dolmen culture of the Early Bronze Age could have been built up by the remote ancestors of the Abkhazian-Adyghe peoples (Inal-Ipa 1964: 2, 1965: 29, 81-82, 1976: 79 ff.). Second, therefore, Abkhazia was the homeland of the Abkhazians, which was proven by its very name, containing the root “ps” closely linked with such Abkhazian notions as “Abkhazian”, “soul”, “homeland”, and “ancestor”. Inal-Ipa reminded his readers that the Abkhazians called themselves the “Apsua”, and their homeland, “Apsny”. Moreover, he found the same root in such ethnic names as the “Apsars” (Georgian Chronicle of the 13th century) and the “Apsilae” (Roman authors in the 1st – 2nd centuries A.D.) (Inal-Ipa 1976: 354-355). Third, until the mid-19th century, all the territory of Abkhazia between the Inguri River and the Mzymta River was occupied mainly by an Abkhazian population (Inal-Ipa 1965: 46-47). To put it differently, the Abkhazians lived in Abkhazia continuously from prehistoric times up to the end of the Caucasian War, after which the ethno-demographic situation drastically changed unfavorably to them. Moreover, with a reference to Georgian linguists, Inal-Ipa wrote of an Abkhazian sub-stratum in the Mingrelian-Chan language, hence, of the impact of Abkhazian on the Georgian language (Inal-Ipa 1964: 5, 1965: 57).

It is interesting to note that, while discussing the ethnogenesis and ethnic history of the Abkhazian people, Inal-Ipa paid attention mainly to the earliest periods, i.e. the Golden Age; he was less interested in the periods of decline, when the Abkhazians were subjugated to foreign powers. Whereas 81 pages of his thick volume were devoted to a description of the archaeological sites and an analysis of the earlier history up to the 10th century, the events of the 13th – 18th centuries were covered by only 5 pages (Inal-Ipa 1965). Thus, he avoided thoroughly analyzing two important periods when contemporary Abkhazian culture was actually formed, one when Abkhazia was part of a united Georgian state for more than two centuries, and the another during later Turkish rule. Indeed, the author, who belonged to an ethnic minority, was aware how difficult it was to analyze the later historical periods and manage to avoid conflict with the official viewpoint

represented by Georgian historiography. Only in the early 1990s did Inal-Ipa get a chance to express openly his views on the Abkhazian history of the later centuries (Inal-Ipa 1992). At the same time, he failed to avoid being on bad terms with Georgian historiography for years.

While bearing in mind the Georgian view, which is well-known to us, Inal-Ipa did his best to advocate the idea of the indigenous origins of the Abkhazians. How did he do that? First, he referred extensively to the archaeological data, in the belief that there was a precise correspondence between an archaeological culture and an ethnic group (Inal-Ipa 1976: 99); he also believed in a long cultural continuity in the territory of Abkhazia from at least the 5th Millennium B.C. onward (Inal-Ipa 1976: 101-102). He pointed to the importance of iron and smithing in Abkhazian religious beliefs, and treated that as the heritage of early metal-workers, whose traces were discovered in the rich archaeological sites of Abkhazia, dated to the Bronze Age. He was convinced that Abkhazia was the main metallurgical center of early Colchis. In order to make the analogies with the Abkhazians more convincing, he supposed that the Colchis inhabitants of the Early Iron Age occupied themselves with transhumance pastoralism, as the Abkhazians had done in the recent past (Inal-Ipa 1965: 68-70, 74). Furthermore, he compared the area of the Bronze Age dolmens with a map of Abkhazian and Adyghe settlements, and found striking correlations between them. Therefore, he had identified the dolmen builders with the Abkhazian-Adyghe ancestors (Inal-Ipa 1965: 36, 1976: 79-100. Also see Markovin 1974: 5, 48-52).

Second, he emphatically denied any mass tribal movements in the east Black Sea region during the classical period. He remarked that there was no archaeological evidence of that at all, and, while referring to Marr's view, assumed that the territory occupied by the Abkhazians in the remote past was much more extensive than it was nowadays, encompassing the southeast Black Sea region (Inal-Ipa 1965: 75-81, 1976: 111, 113)⁷⁰. That was the same region, which, in the Melikishvili's view, had played a crucial role in the formation of the early Georgian population! Yet, Inal-Ipa was looking for compromise with the Georgian approach and wrote that the west Georgian (Mingrelian-Chan) and Abkhazian tribes were represented on equal terms among the bearers of the Colchis archaeological culture. At the same time, he assumed that similarities between the Colchis culture of the east Black Sea region and the Koban culture of the Central Caucasus reflected the linguistic unity of their builders (Inal-Ipa 1964: 2-3, 1965: 82)!

Third, while emphasizing indigenous Abkhazian-Adyghe origins in the east Black Sea region, Inal-Ipa did not give up the idea of "relatives" in Asia Minor as well. Not only did he refer to the historical evidence of the Kashka and Abeshla in early Asia Minor, but he also pointed to the ethnographic cultural parallels between the Abkhazian-Adyghes and the Hittites, and emphasized the great political and cultural importance of the Kashka in Asia Minor in the late 2nd Millennium B.C. Thus, in his view, the Abkhazian-Adyghe settlement embraced a huge territory between the Central Caucasus and the northern and northeastern regions of Asia

Minor in the Late Bronze Age (Inal-Ipa 1964: 3-5, 1965: 83-85, 1976: 122-133, 144-145). It is easy to see that this area corresponded to a major extent with the one depicted by the Georgian historians as the initial territory of the early Georgian tribes. Yet, in Inal-Ipa's view, the "vast territory between the central part of the northern Caucasus and the southern Black Sea region was occupied mainly by the Abkhazian-Adyghe and the related Abeshla-Kashka tribes during the 3rd Millennium B.C. and almost all of the 2nd Millennium B.C., whereas the Kartvelian ethnic element arrived in the eastern and southern Black Sea regions much later than the Kaska". He argued that there were no Georgian-speaking tribes at all in the Colchis and Pontus regions before the 8th century B.C. (Inal-Ipa 1976: 117-118)⁷¹. Moreover, he included the Tibareni and even the Hayasa-Azzi inhabitants, who lived in the Çoroh River Basin, in the early Abkhazian-Adyghe entity (Inal-Ipa 1976: 128-129)⁷².

All of this could well provoke an angry response from Georgian scholars. Therefore, Inal-Ipa was unable to skip this hot issue, and, in order to placate them, he acknowledged that "related Abkhazian-Adyghe-Kartvelian tribes" lived in this region. He emphasized though that this solution was a contribution to the friendship of peoples (Inal-Ipa 1965: 85). In fact, it was a tribute to Soviet Georgian censorship, which could not tolerate a confrontation between the Abkhazian and Georgian scholars and made every effort to ease the tension. At the same time, in his later book, published in 1976, Inal-Ipa put forth his own distinct view more persistently and confidently than he did in the first one.

In search of arguments in favor of the idea of long Abkhazian development in the region in question, Inal-Ipa could not but being tempted by Turchaninov's promising "discovery". For the first time, he referred to it in his paper on the Abkhazian ethnogenesis, delivered at the VII International Congress of the Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences held in Moscow in 1964. He regularly went back to it in his major books thereafter (Inal-Ipa 1964: 8, 1965: 86-87, 1976: 125, 202)⁷³.

Fourth, Inal-Ipa analyzed the list of early east Black Sea region tribes that were mentioned by classical writers. In contrast to Georgian historians, he identified many of these tribes with the early Abkhazians. He emphasized the continuity of ethnic names in the territory of Abkhazia that could serve as one more argument in favor of the autochthonist approach (Inal-Ipa 1965: 86-90, 96-97). At the same time, he initially attempted to concede to the Georgian view, and remarked that a substantial part of the Colchis Kingdom was occupied by the west Georgian (Mingrelian-Chan) tribes (Inal-Ipa 1965: 91). Yet, he failed to explain how it was possible for two populations with very different languages, who lived for a long time at the same territory, not to mix. Even if he was eager to, he was unable to do that because the contemporary ethno-political environment demanded the location of the early tribes in those very territories that their descendants live in nowadays. If the early historical sources contradicted this idea, it was just so much the worse for those sources. All of this put the historian in an ambiguous position. Hence

came the endless contradictions in the works of Inal-Ipa and his counterparts.

At the same time, Inal-Ipa did not fail to emphasize proudly the Abkhazian-Adyge contribution to the formation of the Transcaucasian languages and cultures. In particular, he referred to Abkhazian place names in western Georgia, the traces of Abkhazian impact upon Georgian, and finally, the Abkhazian nickname, Lasha, of Queen Tamar's son. Actually, as we know, Georgian historians themselves mentioned all these facts (Inal-Ipa 1964: 5-6, 1965: 99-100, 135, 1976: 214, 383-388)⁷⁴).

Inal-Ipa linked the political development of the Abkhazians in the 1st Millennium A.D. with several small principalities that initially were in some dependence either on Lazica, or on Byzantium, but were moving towards independence over the course of the late 1st Millennium A.D. This was proven by a seal with a Greek inscription that was found by archaeologists in Pitsunda in 1954. The inscription read that the seal belonged to the local ruler, Constantine of Abasgoi, who was considered an Abkhazian by Inal-Ipa (Inal-Ipa 1965: 113, 124; Dzidzaria 1961: 16). At that time, Abkhazia was strongly affected by the Byzantine culture, and the Greek language was extensively used in religious and commercial matters. That was confirmed by numerous Greek inscriptions found by the archaeologists in various areas of Abkhazia (Inal-Ipa 1965: 124).

While discussing the Abkhazian Kingdom, Inal-Ipa pointed out that the Abkhazians had played a major role in its formation. Indeed, it had emerged at the foundation of the previous Abkhazian Principality. It was headed by the Abkhazian Dynasty, and Abkhazia always enjoyed a prominent position in it. The first period of its development, when its capital was still in Anakopia, (contemporary New Afon), was called the "national period" by Inal-Ipa who, following Marr, stressed in this way that the Kingdom had emerged on an Abkhazian foundation. Later on, the King's residence was moved to Kutatisi (contemporary Kutaisi), a large Georgian population was included, and the Kingdom was gradually Georgianized. Yet, even referring to the later period, Inal-Ipa called it the "Abkhazian-Georgian state" rather than the "Georgian state" as was common in Georgian historiography. He pointed out that the Abkhazians continued playing an important political and military role in united Georgia. While doing this, he referred to not only the primary place of the Abkhazians in the King's title, but also to a coin of the 11th century, discovered by archaeologists, on which the inscription read: "Giorgi – King of the Abkhazians and the Georgians".

It seemed very important for Inal-Ipa to emphasize that Abkhazian-born activists played an active part in the development of the medieval Georgian culture. In this respect, he was attracted by the outstanding medieval theologian, Ioann Petritsi, who was considered a Georgian by Georgian scholars (Menabde 1968: 52; Berdzenishvili et al. 1950: 199, 1962: 214-215; Chabukiani 1995: 28). For his part, Inal-Ipa referred to a letter by a Byzantine philosopher who called Ioann Petritsi an "Abasgian grammarian" and, following Marr, considered this sufficient evidence to establish his Abkhazian identity (Inal-Ipa 1965: 134, 1976: 306-308. Also see

Gogua 1989: 158). As a result, he came to the conclusion that the “Abkhazians, an ethnically non-Georgian tribe, played an important role in the history of Georgia” (Inal-Ipa 1965: 130-132, 135, 1976: 399-413)⁷⁵). True, Inal-Ipa had to soften this with talk of Abkhazian-Georgian friendship during the period of the Abkhazian Kingdom and of the beneficial impact of the Georgian culture upon the Abkhazians (Inal-Ipa 1965: 134).

Inal-Ipa did his best to prove that the Abkhazian people formed at the basis of two ethnic elements, the late classical Abasgoi and the Apsilae, and that this had occurred in the late 1st Millennium A.D., especially during the course of the Abkhazian Kingdom’s emergence. He insisted that it was at that time that a uniform Abkhazian language emerged (Inal-Ipa 1965: 102, 132, 138; 1976: 396, 408), although he was aware that the Abkhazians enjoyed several fairly different dialects, even at the beginning of the 20th century. At the same time, he remarked that the Georgianization of the Abkhazians and their nobility developed in united Georgia, and that this factor had broken up the progressive process of the formation of the Abkhazian people (Inal-Ipa 1965: 139).

Thus, although being close to Anchabadze’s concept in some respects, Inal-Ipa’s views were apparently more Abkhazocentric. An even more radical and, at the same time, more inconsistent approach was developed by another Abkhazian scholar, Ye. S. Shakryl. While referring to the archaeological data, he argued that the Abkhazian-Adyghe tribes were a persistent agent of cultural development in the east Black Sea region since as long ago as Palaeolithic times. At the same time, he was searching for the ancestors of the Abkhazians and the Adyghe in Asia Minor among the Abeshla and the Kashka, respectively. He even insisted that the formation of the Abkhazians and the Adyghe as distinct ethnic groups had taken place in Asia Minor by the end of the 2nd Millennium B.C. Moreover, he assumed that they already had their own writing system at that time. Shakryl was an ardent advocate of the migrationist approach and believed that, while moving northwards from Asia Minor, the ancestors of the Abkhazians and the Adyghe once occupied all the Georgian territory that was reflected in its place names. In his enthusiasm, he went so far as to correct the classical authors and argued that the Apsilae were in the Colchis territory already by the 6th – 5th centuries B.C., despite the fact that earliest evidence of them was provided by Pliny the Elder in the 1st century A.D. Like Inal-Ipa, Shakryl appreciated Turchaninov’s “discovery”, as valuable proof of the Abkhazian-Adyghe’s long stay in the Caucasus (Shakryl 1965).

Finally, in the 1980s, the then young Abkhazian historian and future first president of Abkhazia, V. G. Ardzinba, who was a graduate student at the prestigious Institute of Oriental Studies at the USSR Academy of Sciences, advocated the idea that iron metallurgy was discovered by the Abkhazian-Adyghe ancestors. He based his ideas on folklore data collected by Inal-Ipa that demonstrated the important role of iron in traditional Abkhazian beliefs and rituals. Being a specialist in the early history of Asia Minor, Ardzinba located those early smiths in the very region where Mikeladze and other Georgian historians had not

found anybody but “Georgian” tribes (Chalybes and other) in the 2nd Millennium B.C. (Ardzinba 1983, 1988)⁷⁶).

While slightly different, all the Abkhazian versions of the ethnogenesis and early ethnic history of the Abkhazian people agreed with each other in several important respects. This makes it reasonable to try to formulate a view that expresses the Abkhazian picture of the remote past that has obvious differences from the Georgian view. The Abkhazian view, first, pointed to the deep local roots of the Abkhazian people in the territory of Abkhazia and strove to find confirmation of that in the archaeological data at hand. Second, Abkhazian scholars did not fail to refer to “Asia Minor relatives” or “ancestors” who played the role of culture heroes. Third, they saw the Abkhazian or the Abkhazian-Adyghe ancestors settled throughout vast territories, including those occupied nowadays by Georgians. Fourth, they identified many late classical and early medieval tribes of Colchis, most of all of the Apsilae and Abasgoi, with the Abkhazian ancestors. Fifth, they insisted on the relatively independent political development of the Abkhazians in the Early Middle Ages, which led to the emergence of the Abkhazian Kingdom, headed by its own Abkhazian-born kings. Sixth, they emphasized the significant role of the Abkhazians in the united Georgian state. Finally, they spoke of the formation of the Abkhazian people during the course of the emergence of the Abkhazian Kingdom, while emphasizing that this had occurred several centuries before the Georgian people emerged.

CHAPTER 8

THE ABKHAZIAN-GEORGIAN COMPETITION

Beginning at the very end of the 1970s, it had become fashionable in Georgia to organize annual meetings of local historians in order to demonstrate friendship and fruitful collaboration. The last of those meetings was held in Borzhomi in September 1986. The Georgian, Abkhazian and South Ossetian historians assured each other of their attachment to internationalism and lulled themselves with illusive successes in the field of history (Bol'shoi soviet 1986). It seemed that there was no sign of the coming storm.

All the materials analyzed above demonstrate the main differences between the Georgian and the Abkhazian views of the early history of the east Black Sea region. They concerned most of all the composition of the population of early Colchis. Georgian scholars found there primarily Georgian-speaking tribes, who occupied all the territory from time immemorial until the end of the classical period or perhaps even later. Thus, the Colchians, Kerketai, Heniokhoi, Misimianoï, Sanigai and sometimes even Abasgoi and Apsilae were identified with the Georgians (Inadze 1953: 18-19; Mikeladze 1974: 183, 1990: 79-80; Melikishvili 1959: 65, 91-93; Kaukhchishvili 1965: 28; Lomouri 1990: 161-163). For example, Mikeladze failed to find any Abkhazian ancestors in the east Black Sea regions in the 2nd – 1st Millennia B.C. (Mikeladze 1974: 185). Only a few Georgian authors dared to recognize that the Abkhazian-Adyge ancestors lived in western Georgia before the arrival of Kartvelian-speaking tribes there, or that the Colchian unity included numerous tribes speaking different languages (Dzhaparidze 1976; O. Lordkipanidze 1989: 185, 221). During the last Soviet decades, some Georgian scholars, following Ingoroqva, related the Abkhazian arrival in Abkhazia to the highlanders' invasion of the 17th century. Other more careful authors shared the concept of the "dual aboriginality". They assumed that two different ethnic entities, the Georgian ancestors and those of the Abkhazian-Adyge, occupied Colchis during two millennia (Melikishvili, Lordkipanidze 1989: 188; Lashkhia 1989; Lomouri 1990: 161, 166; Khoshtaria-Brosse 1993: 14-15, 31; Gvantseladze 1992). However, they, too, believed that the Abkhazian-Adyghes arrived there only in the first centuries A.D. in the course of the settlement of highlanders throughout the lowland, where only Kartvelians had lived before (Melikishvili, Lordkipanidze 1989: 326-335⁷⁷). It seems that in the last years of Soviet Georgia the concept of "dual aboriginality" had official support. In particular, it was shared by a professional archaeologist, the

Academician A. M. Apakidze, the vice-president of the Georgian Academy of Sciences.

The Georgian view of the early history of the east Black Sea region became an especially hot issue when the Svan-born historian, T. Sh. Mibchvani, got into the discussion. His book, having been published in the heat of the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict, manifested the appearance of a Svanocentric concept of the early history of Colchis. In his view, all the territory between the Çoroh River and the city of Gagra was initially Svan, whereas the Svans were the first Kartvelian tribe to settle in the east Black Sea region. He identified the Heniokhoi, Misimianoi and Sanigai of the classical authors with the Svans (Mibchvani 1987, 1988, 1989a, 1989b). In contrast to the orthodox Georgian view, he opposed Egrisi to Lazica. In his schema, Egrisi was an early Svan political formation, which was annexed by Lazica later on, and the local Svans were assimilated by the Mingrelians. He went so far as to claim that some of the contemporary Mingrelians still remembered their Svan origin. Moreover, while maintaining the historical nature of the Argonaut myth, he did his best to argue that early Greek seafarers had visited the Svan ancestors, rather than some Kartvelians in general. Thus, early Colchis turned out to be a Svan historical heritage. In order to confirm his view, Mibchvani analyzed place names and found Svan elements among them, not only in the southeast Black Sea region but even in the Gudauta area (Mibchvani 1989a), which the Abkhazians considered their own primordial territory, and where the government of their unrecognized republic is situated nowadays. In brief, Mibchvani advocated the following points that were important to the Svans. First, in his view, the Svans were the first settlers of the east Black Sea region. Second, they built the earliest state there. Third, the Abkhazians were descendants of the Adyge-Circassian tribes who arrived there only in the first centuries A.D.

The Abkhazian scholars were developing the opposite view. To their way of thinking, the Kerketai, Heniokhoi, Achaeans, Mossynoeci/Misimianoi, and Sanigai, i.e. the inhabitants of the seashore and the hilly flanks of the east Black Sea region, were the “direct ancestors of the Abkhazian people”, not the Svans (Anchabadze 1956: 262-265, 268, 1959: 13-16, 1964: 136-137, 169-179; 1976: 30-39, 44-45; Inal-Ipa 1965: 79, 86-90, 93-95, 1976: 176-189, 226-238; Dzidzaria 1960: 36-38, 1961: 15; Gunba 1989a: 139-157). The Abkhazians were especially attracted to the Apsilae and the Abasgoi, and they insisted that the appearance of these tribes, obvious Abkhazian ancestors, on the map of early Colchis was by no means the result of any migration out of the mountains. Rather, it was the result of the growth of knowledge of local ethnic patterns on the part of those late classical authors (Pliny the Elder, Arrian) who visited the region themselves and were much more familiar with the local environment than their predecessors had been (Anchabadze 1956: 12; Inal-Ipa 1976: 204-219)⁷⁸). From this point of view, the Abkhazian ancestors lived in the east Black Sea region from time immemorial, in contrast with the Georgian population. That is why Abkhazian authors emphatically objected the theory of “dual aboriginality”, especially because, in their view, it had political

connotations (for example, see Obrashchenie 1989; Gunba 1989b; Papaskiri 1990; Inal-Ipa 1992: 12; Ashkharua 1993).

The Abkhazian interpretation of the Colchian Kingdom was also different from the Georgian one. The Abkhazian authors viewed it as an unstable political formation consisting of various ethnic groups, including the west Georgians and the Abkhazians, rather than as a homogeneous centralized state (Inal-Ipa 1965: 68, note 1, 90-91; Anchabadze 1964: 156-160, 1976: 27-28; Dzidzaria 1960: 24; Anchabadze et al. 1986: 25-26). This was how they explained numerous local variants within the Colchis culture. Anchabadze and Inal-Ipa shared the idea of the Colchis Kingdom and considered it a real political formation. They agreed with Georgian authors that it had formed on a local foundation, and referred to archaeological evidence of obvious social differentiation there. In their view, the latter demonstrated that social classes had already formed in Colchis in the 1st Millennium B.C. (Anchabadze 1964: 142-143, 1976: 27; Inal-Ipa 1965: 91, 107; Dzidzaria 1961: 14-15). Yet, Inal-Ipa avoided exaggerating the role of the Kingdom and recognized the great impact of the Greeks upon the local residents. He acknowledged the important political and cultural role of the Greek cities (Dioscurias, Pityus, Gyenos) in Abkhazian territory, which affected local development positively. He emphasized that the Greeks had brought literacy to the east Black Sea region (Inal-Ipa 1965: 108-118, 1976: 190-193).

At the same time, he did his best to find arguments in favor of a close association between the Colchis Kingdom and the Abkhazians. He recognized that there were still no good grounds for a resolution of the "colchidki" issue. Were they minted by the local rulers or by the Greek cities? Yet, he believed that the representation of a bull's head on the coins could be somehow linked with the early Abkhazian bull cult (Inal-Ipa 1965: 107, 1976: 201). Anchabadze was even more convinced that the coins were minted by local authorities (Anchabadze 1964: 144. Also see Dzidzaria 1961: 15). While analyzing the relationships between the Colchis Kingdom and the Greeks, Anchabadze shared the Georgian approach and maintained that local state power restricted Greek colonization (Anchabadze 1964: 147-148, 160-161; Anchabadze et al. 1986: 24). Yet, he recognized a cultural interaction beneficial to both sides and in particular resulting in some Hellenization of the local population (Anchabadze 1976: 27, 40-41; Anchabadze et al. 1986: 34). Anyway, whereas the Georgians treated the Colchis Kingdom as a Georgian entity, the Abkhazians cast doubts on that. They were eager to find an Abkhazian ethnic element there. For example, while analyzing the Colchian issue, Anchabadze pointed out that the early authors frequently used this term as an inclusive one which covered not only the Mingrelian-Chans but other non-related tribes living in Colchis as well (Anchabadze 1964: 132-134, 1976: 29-30; Anchabadze et al. 1986: 25). In the same way, Inal-Ipa made every effort to prove that one should not identify the Colchians with the Georgian element alone, and that many features of the Colchian heritage could only be understood properly with reference to Abkhazian traditional culture (Inal-Ipa 1976: 200-203).

Abkhazian-Georgian competition expressed itself in the approach to the problem of early Christianity in Georgia. According to the historical evidence at hand, Christianity had arrived in Georgia and Abkhazia quite simultaneously in the 4th century, albeit along different routes. The Georgian authors emphasized the activities of St. Nino, who had arrived in Mtskheta from Cappadocia along the Kura River Valley. She had affected the Kartli king so strongly that he introduced Christianity as the state religion in his Kingdom. The Georgian Church considers St. Nino their first "national saint" (Berdzenishvili et al. 1950: 91, 1962: 85; Amiranashvili 1963: 90; Beridze 1974: 4-5; Tukhashvili 1989. Also see Igumen Vladimir, *Vigilianskii* 1992; Braund 1994: 246-252). While emphasizing that point, the Georgian approach either played down or ignored the role of Abkhazia in the introduction of Christianity in Transcaucasia. For example, the fundamental works on the history of art and architecture in Georgia either bypassed early medieval Abkhazia or mentioned its early Christian churches only in passing (for example, see Amiranashvili 1963: 113-114; Beridze 1967: 14, 43-44, 1974; Dzhamburidze, Tsitsishvili 1976: 41-42). At the same time, Georgian authors never failed to mention the Besleti Bridge of the 11th – 12th centuries, situated close to Sukhumi, where a medieval Georgian inscription was discovered in 1934 (Beridze 1967: 19, 59; Dzhamburidze, Tsitsishvili 1976: 84. For this discovery, see Bgaghba 1967: 20; Pachulia 1968: 27).

Meanwhile, Christianity was already present in the Abasgoi territory in the 4th century. It had arrived from Byzantium, and Pityus became one of the major centers of Christianity in the Caucasus. Although Christianity received state status among the Abasgoi only in the 6th century, as in the neighboring Lazica, Christian churches, including one of the earliest in the Caucasus, were already built in their territory by the 4th – 5th centuries. In particular, Abkhazian authors used to emphasize that in Pityus archaeologists had excavated the remains of the only large three-apsed church in Georgia, dated to the 5th century. They reported that a church intended for the Abkhazians had been built there in A.D. 551, and that the residence of the "Abkhazian" catholicos, whose ecclesiastic power was recognized throughout west Georgia, was situated there (Anchabadze 1959: 23-25, 1976: 41; Inal-Ipa 1965: 113-114, 124, 1976: 301; Dzidzaria 1960: 41, 44, 1961: 16).

Archaeology provided much new interesting and important data on early Christianity in Abkhazia. In particular, marvelous mosaics had been discovered at the church of the 4th – 5th century in Pityus, and Inal-Ipa attempted to relate some of their representations to Abkhazian folk beliefs (Inal-Ipa 1976: 299-300). The archaeological excavations in Tsebel'da that were identified with the Apsilae capital were of great importance in the discussion of the introduction of Christianity to the Abkhazian hinterland. It was established that the majority of the local population was already Christian in the 5th century. That is why, whereas initially Anchabadze considered that the Abkhazian population of early medieval times still held pre-Christian beliefs, he later pointed out that Christianity was already playing a big role there in the 4th – 5th centuries A.D. (Anchabadze 1976: 41-42). With other

Abkhazian authors, he pointed to the extensive church building activity in Abkhazia in the late 1st Millennium A.D. (Anchabadze 1959: 152-153; Pachulia 1968: 8-9; 1976: 120; Gunba 1989a: 91-95).

The Abkhazian view of the early history of Abkhazia and the Abkhazians presented to the general public was placed in tourist booklets, brochures and popular books that were widely published. Many of them were written by V. P. Pachulia, a "scholar in the field of tourism", as he was called by the well-known Soviet historian M. A. Korostovtsev. In his books Pachulia, who had once begun a career in archaeology, argued that Abkhazia was the homeland of the Abkhazians (Pachulia 1968; 1976). The same idea was put forth in a jubilee publication devoted to the 40th anniversary of Soviet power in Abkhazia (Dzidzaria 1961) and in school textbooks in the history of Abkhazia (Dzidzaria 1960; Anchabadze et al. 1986), although all this sort of publication emphasized the "deep and indissoluble" cultural and historical bonds between the Abkhazian and Georgian peoples.

At the same time, the Abkhazian problem was so hot that studies in the field of the history of Abkhazia were under strict control by the local authorities late in the Soviet era. All this kind of work was censored. Only people loyal to the authorities were encouraged to carry on these studies, and historical concepts that deviated from the officially approved view were either denied publication or heavily criticized. This related most of all to those works that expressed overt ethnocentrism, Georgian or Abkhazian. For example, in order not to make the Abkhazians angry, the Georgian authorities prohibited a new edition of Ingoroqva's book, "Giorgi Merchule" and did their best to stop publication of his followers' works (Lomouri 1990: 159). At the same time, those chapters in the first Abkhazian textbook on history that discussed the hottest issues of the early medieval period, in particular the formation of the Abkhazian Kingdom, were written by the Georgian historian M. D. Lordkipanidze. In accordance with well-established Georgian tradition, she reproduced Dzhnashia's conception of the Abkhazian Kingdom and emphasized first, the dominance of the Georgian population there, and second, the gradual Georgianization of the Kingdom. That included its ecclesiastic subordination to the Kartli catholicos and the spread of the Georgian language and writing system. Although she acknowledged that the Abkhazians played an active political role, not only in the Abkhazian Kingdom, but also in united Georgia later on, she still insisted that the Abkhazian Kingdom was a "Georgian political formation". Moreover, she "revealed" the "aspiration of the Abkhazian feudal society to join in the higher Georgian feudal life-style" (Dzidzaria 1960: 48-63, 64-71). In contrast to this flat conclusion, an Abkhazian author in the same textbook demonstrated that the Abkhazian nobility was dissatisfied with their subordinate position in united Georgia and revolted from time to time (Dzidzaria 1960: 75-78). Yet, the next textbook on Abkhazian history that was published in 1986 was based on the same pro-Georgian approach to the Abkhazian Kingdom and its policy (Anchabadze et al. 1986: 45-49). Apparently, the authors were pressed by Party officials, as the Decree of the CC CPG of April 25, 1978, demanded that the

manuscript of the textbook must be discussed at the Bureau of the CC CPG (Marykhuba 1994a: 284).

This made the Abkhazians angry, and they tried to complain to higher Party and Soviet authorities. In their letter to the Presidium of the XIX All-Union Party Conference, in 1988, they gave the following description of current historiography (Prilozhenie 1989; Marykhuba 1994a: 383-439). They pointed to the speech of the secretary of ideology of the CC CPG, G. N. Yenukidze, at the All-Union Meeting of Ideological Activists, held in Moscow on October 16-17, 1979. While discussing M. A. Suslov's speech, "On the further improvement of ideological, political education", Yenukidze complained that the central Publishing Houses of the country published books in local history without any consultation with the local historians in the respective republics. He claimed that poor quality publications were the result, which ignored the already established (i.e. created by Georgian scholars. V. Sh.) scholarly works and concepts. He was obviously displeased with the discussion of hot historical issues. Yenukidze talked of "bourgeois nationalist propaganda" and called on the relevant authorities to demonstrate its harm and to explain openly "whom those studies served" (Yenukidze 1979)⁷⁹). The Abkhazians perceived this talk as a clear attempt to introduce control over all academic studies carried out outside Georgian academic institutions, and to establish a Georgian monopoly in the field of the history of the Caucasian peoples.

What was Yenukidze's talk aiming at? The new ideological campaign that was launched in Georgia was caused, in particular, by the publication of a book by the Russian archaeologist, Yury N. Voronov, who lived and worked in Abkhazia. The book, entitled, "In the world of the architectural monuments of Abkhazia", was published in Moscow in 1978 by the Iskusstvo Publishing House. It led to a storm of indignation among Georgian scholars (for that see Marykhuba 1994b: 42). One of the leading specialists in the history of Georgian architecture, an Academician of the Georgian Academy of Sciences, V. V. Beridze, immediately wrote a highly critical review of it. This review targeted the "falsifications of the history of Georgia and Abkhazia", but it was not published at that time (Lomouri 1990: 160).

While acknowledging that Voronov was very familiar with the historical materials, Beridze considered it important to make some corrections and to point to errors from which, in his view, the book was suffering. In fact, the problem was that Voronov treated the Georgian version of medieval history without the required respect, and was one of the authors Yenukidze had warned against (Voronov 1989c). In Beridze's view, the author should have pointed out that the Abkhazian Kingdom included western Georgia and, thus, a large Georgian population from the very beginning. In addition, he omitted that this "west Georgian Kingdom" was an initiator of the struggle for the establishment of an all-Georgian national (sic! V. Sh.) state and that Georgian was the basis of the literary culture there. (Naturally, Beridze failed to mention that Greek was actually the literary language in the Abkhazian Kingdom in an earlier period! V. Sh.). Beridze maintained that even at the time of Byzantine rule, the local architecture was more related to Georgia than

to Byzantium. As a result, Beridze made heavy accusations against Voronov, as though the latter had distorted the history of the Abkhazian-Georgian relationships, and called his book “tendentious and incompetent” (Beridze 1989. Also see Chabukiani 1995: 28). It is worth noting that, although this review was not officially published in the very late 1970s, typed copies were extensively disseminated and, apparently, affected public opinion in Georgia.

By that time, Yury N. Voronov (1941-1995) had already proved to be one of the best archaeologists in Abkhazia. He was born to a Russian family in the village of Tsebel'da, and his family had been connected with Abkhazia for several generations. It is sufficient to note that his grandfather served as mayor of Sukhumi and contributed heavily to its flourishing in the pre-revolutionary period. In 1966, Voronov graduated from the Oriental Faculty of Leningrad State University and, in 1971, defended his Candidate in History thesis on the “History of Abkhazia from the earliest times up to the early medieval period”. He took part in many archaeological projects in Abkhazia, but was especially interested in the classical period, and was involved in the ongoing and highly productive archaeological excavations in Tsebel'da. He defended his Doctor of History thesis in 1986. It relied heavily on the results of his excavations and was entitled the “East Black Sea region in the Early Iron Age”. In the meantime, his academic career was not without problems, due to the aforementioned Georgian scholars' attitudes and the policies of the Georgian authorities. In 1978, he was the target of severe criticism at a meeting of the Department of Archaeology of the ARIHLL, because of his ignorance of the impact of the Georgian architectural tradition upon Abkhazia. At the time of turmoil in Tbilisi in 1978-1979, his book was ritually burnt on the Rustaveli prospect and the Georgian Academy of Sciences labeled his book “black”. From then on, his academic studies were permanently hampered, both by the local authorities and by Georgian scholars (Voronov 1989c). Moreover, this internal Georgian policy was approved by the leading Soviet ideologist, M. Suslov (for that, see Lakoba 1998b: 99).

Another paper that was written in 1978 and denied publication by Soviet censors is of no less interest. The paper was completed by a Georgian specialist in the historical geography of Georgia, the future corresponding member of the Georgian Academy of Sciences, D. Muskhelishvili, in response to the demands of certain Abkhazian intellectuals for transfer of Abkhazia out of the Georgian SSR. The author was indignant about this claim and attempted to respond both as an historian and as a Georgian patriot – yet, patriotic pathos obviously outweighed a thorough professional approach (Muskhelishvili 1989).

While depicting the long and complicated process of shaping the territory of the Georgian state, on the one hand he recognized that “related and unrelated tribes and peoples” took part in it. On the other hand, violating his own logic, he claimed that “the development of the national territory was in fact the result of the activities of a distinct people” and naturally they were the Georgian people! The author rested on an organic primordialist theory of the origin of the state and maintained that the

formation of the Georgian territory was by no means the result of accidental political processes. Instead, Georgia was a “natural organic unit that had formed on a groundwork of physico-geographical and economic-geographical unity”. Moreover, he claimed that, in the course of state formation, “at a certain stage a tribe or people who lived under a more favorable natural environment or were better adapted to their environment appropriated an advantageous position”, and further development took place under the “hegemony of that tribe or people”. The author did his best to prove that progress in western Georgian development was the result of the permanent infiltration of east Georgian tribes who brought there the fruits of a higher civilization.

Thus, Muskhelishvili connected the emergence of the state and its development with the favorable influence of a Georgian agent⁸⁰). He connected its weakening and the re-shaping of its boundaries with changes in ethnic composition in some of its regions. All of this was the result of the “domination of Caucasian highlanders” or the “aggressive policies” of the Abkhazian rulers. In other words, accidental factors broke up the harmony of the “organic theory” that the author admired so much. The arrival of the Abkhazians in the territory of Abkhazia was viewed as later highlander intrusion during the period of decline of the Georgian state. The author argued that these newcomers mixed with the local inhabitants. That was why, he said, Abkhazia was always a part of Georgia, and its whole population was of a mixed “Abkhazian-Georgian” nature. Although the name Ingoroqva was not mentioned, his spirit obviously inspired all this reasoning, colored not so much by a historical as by a geopolitical and to some extent even a racial style of thinking⁸¹).

Unfortunately, this style of thinking dominated Georgian historiography in the post-Stalin era. It was also the basis of school education. The Georgian authorities did their best to prevent open discussions of those scholarly views that contradicted the Georgian orthodox concept of the past, and the historical field was under strict control. That control was introduced in Georgia especially after the turmoil of 1978⁸²). From that time forward, the publication of historical concepts that contradicted the main points of Georgian historiography was blocked in Georgia. It is no accident that, as we know, the history of the formation of the Abkhazian Kingdom and evaluation of its distinct features and policies were persistently represented according to Dzhnashia’s view; no deviations from it were permitted. Moreover, Georgian authors sometimes played down cultural development in Abkhazia or neglected it altogether. For example, in a special booklet on the development of archaeology within the territory of the Georgian SSR, one of the leading Georgian archaeologists, O. D. Lordkipanidze, mentioned archaeological research in Abkhazia only in passing. While emphasizing the importance of the early Georgian monuments, that author failed to mention those that were considered part of the “early Abkhazian heritage” by Abkhazian authors (Lordkipanidze 1982). Naturally, the Abkhazians were quite dissatisfied with that (for example, see Otyrba 1994: 282).

True, the Georgian authorities tried to attain some balance, on the basis of the

Decree of the CC CPG of April 25, 1978, which demanded that the “departments of propaganda and agitation, and the science and educational institutions of the CC CPG strengthen their control over publications focused on the history of Georgia and Abkhazia” (Marykhuba 1994a: 284). That is why the most offensive versions of history presented by Georgian authors were not published either. Take for example, the eighth volume of the collected works of the Academician N. Berdzenishvili. When initially published, it was entitled “Issues in Georgian History” and it contained ideas about the Abkhazian people’s origins very close to those of Ingoroqva. Due to Abkhazian pressure, these ideas were withdrawn from the first edition that had come out in the very late 1960s. The eighth volume was not published until 1990 (for that, see Lomouri 1990: 159; Gamakharia, Gogia 1997: 144, note 113). As has been already mentioned, a new edition of Ingoroqva’s works was delayed for the same reason. Ideas that might make the Abkhazians angry were regularly withdrawn from the publications of Georgian historians. They did not publish Georgian reviews of Abkhazian publications if the reviewers emphasized that the latter played down the role of Georgian culture and history (Lomouri 1990: 159-160). Yet, the greatest ideological pressure was aimed at the Abkhazian rather than the Georgian historical school. It is worth noting that, at the meeting of the Abkhazian Branch of the CPG held in Sukhumi on October 2, 1978, the initiators of the turmoil were identified as Abkhazians⁸³).

That is why for their part, Abkhazian authors complained that in the early 1980s, the publication of several books by Abkhazian historians and philologists was delayed or even cancelled. In particular, they pointed to the elimination of all the printed copies of G. Z. Shakirbai’s book, entitled “Abkhazian Place Names of Greater Sochi” (Sukhumi 1978) in which the author discussed Abkhazian settlement in the territory of contemporary Krasnodar Province of the Russian Federation during the medieval period. Obviously, certain officials treated the book as potentially dangerous because it might be used by the Abkhazians for claims to the northern territories.

A book on Abkhazian folklore by the Abkhazian philologist, S. L. Zukhba, spent years in the publishing house. It was published only after the author withdrew all criticism of Georgian historiography, having been pressed by the Abkhazian branch of the CPG. The aforementioned new textbook on Abkhazian history (Anchabadze et al. 1986) also spent five years in the publishing house. It came out only after its contents had been adjusted to meet the requirements of Georgian historiography. The publication of Inal-Ipa’s book, “Issues of the Ethnocultural History of the Abkhazians”, (Sukhumi 1976) caused a furious campaign in the local media, which treated the book as a harmful intrigue violating the friendship between the Georgian and the Abkhazian peoples (Za glubokoe nauchnoe izuchenie 1977)⁸⁴). The large scale of the scandal demanded the intervention of the Department of Science and Education Institutions of the CC CPSU, where they asked several leading Soviet scholars to evaluate the book. The specialists found nothing implausible there; rather, their review was quite favorable and positive.

At the same time, Inal-Ipa did not get a chance to respond to his critics in the media of the Republic. Those critics were the well-known Abkhazian scholars, Z. Anchabadze and G. Dzidzaria, who at that time headed historical studies in Abkhazia and for that reason had to keep their eyes on Tbilisi (Marykhuba 1994a: 262). Suffice it to note that in the 1970s they published a book about the everlasting friendship between the Georgian and the Abkhazian peoples, in which they mentioned the “Georgian policies of the Abkhazian Kings” and the hegemony of the Kartvelian element in the Abkhazian Kingdom (Anchabadze, Dzidzaria 1972). It is well known that there were numerous Georgian reviews attacking Inal-Ipa’s book (M. Lordkipanidze 1989; Lomouri 1990: 159). Yet, they were not published at that time; a Jesuitical decision was made that the Abkhazian author should be criticized only by Abkhazians – as if this made the organizers of the campaign invulnerable to reproaches of non-objectivity. Interestingly enough, the positive review of Inal-Ipa’s book written by the Moscow specialists was never published, due to a decision by the Georgian authorities. In July 1977, several Abkhazian historians sent letters to the Department of Science of the CC CPSU, to the First Secretary of the CC CPG, E. A. Shevardnadze, and to the First Secretary of the Abkhazian Branch of the CC CPG, V. M. Khintba, in order to defend Inal-Ipa’s book (Marykhuba 1994a: 189-204). They never received a response.

The misadventures of the outstanding Abkhazian ethnographer were not over. By the end of the 1980s, he had completed a monograph about the Sadze, a distinct ethnic group that lived between Gagra and Sochi in the 19th century and spoke an Abkhazian-like language. Yet, its publication was delayed in Tbilisi; they disliked the author’s idea that an Abkhazian-speaking people had lived in that area in the past. Indeed, Georgian scholars used to identify the early medieval Sanigai, who lived in the northern Abkhazian borderlands, with the Mingrelians-Chans rather than with the Sadze (Lomouri 1990: 162-163). It took a lot of effort by the author to get his manuscript back from the Tbilisi Publishing House. I was told this story by Inal-Ipa himself (Shnirelman 1989a). In 1989, Georgian authors brought down upon him numerous accusations of charlatanism and incompetence (for example, see Lomouri 1990: 161-172)⁸⁵.

At the same time, dozens of books and articles were published in Georgia which were treated by the Abkhazians as not only neglecting their own past but attempting to appropriate, to “Georgianize” it. As early as the end of 1979, Abkhazian historians compiled a list of this sort of publications, including more than 30 titles. They listed among their authors such well-known Georgian historians as M. D. Lordkipanidze, S. G. Kaukhchishvili, S. S. Kakabadze, the economist P. V. Gugushvili, the historian of art I. Adamia and others. The Abkhazians were especially alarmed at their ignorance about the Abkhazian people, the claims to territorial rights and historical heritage that characterized certain popular books in the Georgian SSR, the ethnographic and historical maps published in Georgia and the school textbooks in history (Marykhuba 1994a: 206-218, 261-262). In particular, in a magnificent jubilee book about the Georgian SSR, published in

Moscow in 1967, the Abkhazians found themselves included in a list of the peoples for whom Georgia became a second homeland (Antadze et al. 1967: 82). This error was criticized even by the official Georgian newspaper, "Zaria Vostoka" (Sovetskii Soiuz, Gruziiia 1968). The Abkhazians could not help but greet such statements with open anger (Marykhuba 1994a: 211).

The Abkhazians were especially displeased with the jubilee encyclopedia, "The Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic", published in 1981 on the 60th anniversary of the Georgian SSR (Abashidze 1981). Although both the Georgian and the Abkhazian views of the past were represented there, compiled by G. Melikishvili and M. Lordkipanidze from the Georgian side and Z. Anchabadze from the Abkhazian side, the Abkhazians perceived it as an openly anti-Abkhazian book that rested on the ideological pressure of Georgian historiography. They pointed to the obvious Georgiacentric nature of the encyclopedia and its neglect of the ethnic minorities living in Georgia. They revealed in the Georgian version of the past represented in the book vivid touches from Ingoroqva's views. They were also indignant about the historical maps included in the encyclopedia, where Abkhazia was represented as an early Georgian territory, the region of the early Georgian Kingdom's flourishing (Marykhuba 1994a: 363-373). In connection with this publication, they arranged a meeting of the ARIHLL staff with G. Ye. Yenukidze, who had publicly recognized that "there were certain people behind the historians whom the CC CPG was not able to deal with" (Marykhuba 1994a: 424).

Note that the Abkhazians also complained that the "Nauka" Publishing House refused to publish Turchaninov's new book in which the proto-Byblos and Phoenician writing systems, the earliest alphabets in fact, were called an Abkhazian invention (for that also, see Marykhuba 1994b: 39, note 9). As has been mentioned, the book was not published because all the reviews by specialists proved to be negative. In the meantime, Turchaninov's historical concept was appreciated by the Abkhazians, who did their best to free themselves of the pressure of Georgian historiography.

In the early 1980s, they did not publish the monograph by the Abkhazian archaeologist, M. M. Gunba, which was focused on early medieval Abkhazia. It came out only in 1989, when censorship pressures were released. What was the book about and why had it provoked a negative response from Georgian historians? In fact, Gunba was an ardent proponent of the Abkhazian view of the past and manifested it in a more radical way than his other Abkhazian counterparts. He very much objected to the Georgian belief that Georgian tribes alone occupied the Colchis seashore in the classical period. Instead, he argued that it was the Abkhazian ancestors who lived there in late classical times and even earlier, during the Colchis Kingdom period. He also came out against the identification of the Tsel'ba archaeological culture with the Georgians, that was held by certain Georgian authors.

While disputing Melikishvili's view, he attempted to demonstrate that the Abkhazian ancestors were by no means less advanced than the Georgians in the late

classical – early medieval period, and were able to form their own political bodies. By contrast to other Abkhazian historians, he mobilized a great deal of archaeological data to prove that. He put into doubt the idea that the early Abkhazian polities were dependent on Lazica, and he did his best to disprove this generally accepted conclusion. He also objected emphatically to the idea that Pityus and Sebastopolis (the former Dioscurias and the future Sukhumi) were Georgian (Laz) cities, as well as to the assumption of certain Georgian authors that the Abkhazians were baptized through Laz mediation. He did his best to disprove the Georgian view that the Abasgoi Principality was initially dependent on Lazica or even Kartli, and insisted that it was subordinated directly to Byzantium. He was naturally displeased with the Georgian tradition of calling the Abkhazian Kingdom the “Georgian Kingdom” and to identify its dominant majority with the Georgians. He maintained that the Kingdom was built by the Abkhazians, and protested against Georgian encroachment upon the Abkhazian historical heritage. While pointing to the long Greek presence in the east Black Sea region, he argued that the Greeks affected the Abkhazians much more effectively than the Georgians did; hence, the big difference between the social relationships among the Abkhazians, on the one hand, and the Georgians, on the other.

To put it differently, he used all available means to prove that the early medieval Abkhazian tribes did not concede to Georgian political entities such as Lazica in western Georgia or Kartli in eastern Georgia. His other idea was that the Abkhazians had never had a position of unity with the Georgians, and he referred extensively to both historical and archaeological evidence to confirm that. He pointed out that, although the Abkhazian Kingdom was a multi-ethnic state, it was ruled by the Abkhazians, who carried out their own Abkhazian policies rather than Georgian ones, as Georgian authors constantly claimed. Moreover, he did not overlook the long territorial dispute between the Abkhazians and the Georgians in the southern Abkhazian borderland (historical Samurzaqano), and argued that there were no Laz there in the distant past (Gunba 1989a).

Sometimes, his enthusiasm led him too far, and he leapt to implausible conclusions. For example, he attempted to push the baptism of Abasgia further into the past and argued that its king became a Christian at the beginning of the 4th century A.D. For no good reason, he maintained that Christianity was easily and rapidly introduced to the common people. Moreover, he picked up the Christian myth of the mission of St. Andrew and assumed that Abasgia and Apsilia were baptized by this ascetic. Thus, in his view, Abkhazia turned to be one of the earliest Christian countries in the world, or at least an earlier one than Georgia! Moreover, while daring to correct historical sources, Gunba made the first Abkhazian King not Leon II, as was well-established in historiography, but his predecessor, Leon I, whom Gunba represented as the ruler of a powerful state.

An Abkhazian archaeologist, I. I. Tsvinaria, went even further and intentionally opposed the prehistoric evolution in west Transcaucasia with that of east Transcaucasia (Tsvinaria 1990). He emphasized that cultural continuity from

Palaeolithic times was traced in the west, whereas certain important chronological periods (for example, the Neolithic) were lacking in the east. He considered that a sufficient basis to argue that the local inhabitants invented farming and animal husbandry quite independently in the western Caucasus. Tsvinaria maintained that local tribes played a major role in regional cultural development. True, he acknowledged that some newcomers might have arrived there from elsewhere from time to time, but they dissolved among the local inhabitants without a trace. Moreover, he put forward the hypothesis that the earliest food-producing economy would have been brought to Mesopotamia from the Caucasus⁸⁶). In particular, in contrast to what was well established by professional archaeologists, he assumed that it was not that the Maikop culture of the northwest Caucasus was greatly affected by cultural influences from the Near East but vice-versa: that the bearers of the Maikop culture affected the development of the Near East. He also derived the well-known Kura-Arax archaeological culture of the Early Bronze Age from the western Caucasus and strove to demonstrate that its bearers became ungrateful towards their "elder brothers". "Having been pressed by the aggressive ethnic body of the Kura-Arax culture bearers, the west Caucasian culture... declined, and its bearers were assimilated and dissolved among the former" (Tsvinaria 1990: 19-20). Having said that, Tsvinaria represented the Abkhazians-Adyghes as the genuine indigenous people in the Caucasus. It was they who had built up the west Caucasian culture. The Kartvelians were represented as newcomers who had nothing to do with the early Caucasian world. It was they who were the bearers of the "aggressive Kura-Arax archaeological culture" (Tsvinaria 1990: 25-28). Although this assumption contradicted his own concept of the Kura-Arax culture's roots in the west Caucasus, the archaeologist turned out to be a prophet. While discussing what happened 5,000 years ago, he was actually predicting the invasion of Georgian troops into Abkhazia in August 1992.

CHAPTER 9

FROM COMPETITION TO CONFRONTATION

Whereas the ethnocentric approach became more and more popular among Abkhazian scholars in the 1980s, it was no less characteristic of their Georgian counterparts. In the very late 1980s, Ingoroqvasesque ideas became widespread in Georgian publications, namely that the Georgian tribes made up both the indigenous and dominant population in the Abkhazian Kingdom, which should be called the “Georgian one”, and that this state carried out “Georgian policies”. Moreover, they maintained that it was less advanced, in contrast with the contemporary Georgian principalities, and that it inherited a lot of the Egrisi political legacy (Badridze 1988; Paichadze 1988). Naturally, the Abkhazians were irritated by all this sort of thing (Inal-Ipa, Amichba 1989).

It would be erroneous to believe that radical ethnocentric views about the past suddenly appeared only in the late 1980s. First, as we know, for a long time the Abkhazians and Georgians expressed very different views about what happened in the distant past and how it happened. Yet the Georgian view of history was an integral part of the official ideology of Georgia; it made up the core message of school textbooks and university courses, and was permanently imposed upon the general public by the media. In contrast, the creators of the Abkhazian view of the past met numerous obstacles, their manuscripts were frequently denied publication because they were considered “deviations from the scholarly truth”, i.e. from the Georgian view of history. It was also not easy to teach Abkhazian history at school. In this environment, many versions of the Abkhazian past lived only in oral history, and artificially constructed obstacles made them more and more radical. In time, those who shared the anti-Georgian stance enjoyed better chances of getting the position of secretary in ideology of the Abkhazian Branch of the CC CPG (Marshania 1995: 197).

Second, the most radical approaches and statements on both sides had been hindered by censorship and unable to appear in the media in former times. This became obvious at the end of the 1980s, when letters, articles and reviews that had been completed but denied publication in previous years began to appear in Georgian newspapers. Muskhelishvili’s aforementioned letter (Muskhelishvili 1989) and Beridze’s review (Beridze 1989) were among those that demonstrated the attitudes of Georgian intellectuals a decade before. Beridze’s review was published only in early April 1989. Slightly before that, an article by A. Bakradze, a deputy of

the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, had come out in a popular Georgian newspaper, in which the author recalled Voronov's book, and represented the Russian archaeologist as an instigator willing to undermine the traditional friendship between the Abkhazians and the Georgians (Bakradze 1989)⁸⁷). The two articles launched a furious campaign in the Georgian media against Yury Voronov. As a result, at the time of the first bloody clash between the Abkhazians and the Georgians on July 15-16, 1989, the "Yasochka" Memorial Museum was attacked and plundered. It was situated in the Abkhazian village of Tsebel'da and was devoted to Voronov's ancestors, who had made a valuable contribution to the cultural development of Abkhazia. Simultaneously, the site of the archaeological excavations in Tsebel'da, carried out by Voronov, was also vandalized (Voronov 1989a, 1989b).

This did not put a stop to the ideological campaign, and the Svan historian, T. Sh. Mibchvani, already known to us, accused Voronov of the falsification of Svan history, simply because the latter refused to identify the early medieval Sanigai with the ancestors of the contemporary Svans (Mibchvani 1989b)⁸⁸). From that time forward, Voronov was hunted. In order to find a place for himself in the rapidly changing political environment, on October 25, 1989 Voronov initiated the establishment of the Sukhumi Society of Internationalists. Yet, the harsh Abkhazian-Georgian confrontation left no room for his romantic idea of ethnic peace and harmony. Following his family's tradition, he had supported the Abkhazians and was appointed Vice-Premier in the government of the new Abkhazia. Simultaneously, he published a series of articles in the Abkhazian media which were intended for schoolteachers teaching the history of Abkhazia (for that, see Marykhuba 1994b: 43). When Sukhumi was attacked by Georgian troops in August 1992, Voronov's apartment was plundered and vandalized, and on September 11, 1995 Voronov himself was assassinated at the entrance of his home.

A sharp escalation of Abkhazian-Georgian conflicts took place during the course of 1988 – 1989, when passions formerly restricted to mild discussions in scholarly publications flooded numerous popular newspapers and journals (for that, see Marykhuba 1994b: 40-47). At that time an extensive report was compiled by Abkhazian intellectuals and sent to the XIX All-Union Communist Party Conference (June 1988), which was called the "Abkhazian letter" (Prilozhenie 1989; Marykhuba 1994a: 383-439). This appeal was approved by the Abkhazian public at a crowded meeting at the village of Lykhny on March 18, 1989. Soon after that, it was sent to the leaders of the USSR (the General Secretary of the CC CPSU and the Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, M. S. Gorbachev, and the Chairman of the Soviet of Ministers of the USSR, N. I. Ryzhkov), the directorship of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR and the directors of the major research institutes (Obrashchenie 1989). The Abkhazians claimed that Abkhazia had to receive back the status of a Soviet Socialist Republic, which it had been granted in 1921. In the late 1980s, this demand was at the heart of numerous letters sent by Abkhazians to the CC CPSU (Perechen' 1989: 163). This

claim was discussed in an 87-page manuscript that focused on a detailed analysis of Abkhazian history as well as the contemporary social and political environment in Abkhazia.

In this report, Abkhazian intellectuals complained that they still had to protect their ethnocultural authenticity. They said they were alarmed about Abkhazia's chances for survival, and accused the Georgian authorities of a persistent intentional anti-Abkhazian policy. Their report commenced with a historical overview, and they claimed that the "Abkhazians were the earliest autochthonous inhabitants of the western Caucasus, who had lived there permanently since the 4th – 3rd Millennia B.C.". Indigenous status was so important to them that they were unwilling to share it with anybody else, and they emphatically protested against the idea of "two indigenous peoples", which had become very popular among Georgian writers by that time.

Besides, the Abkhazians maintained that, for centuries, Abkhazia had struggled to secure its political independence. They glorified the Abkhazian Kingdom, which reached its climax in the 8th – 10th centuries, when it annexed west Georgian lands. Later on, it took on the appearance of an "Abkhazian-Georgian" state, which was still called the Abkhazian Kingdom in medieval chronicles. They argued that after the Kingdom disintegrated, Abkhazia still secured its sovereignty until the Turkish conquest in the 16th century. The letter's authors insisted that Abkhazia had consciously joined the Russian Empire in 1810.

While unwilling to go deeper into the issue of the severe repressions by the Tsarist government of the Abkhazians in the 1860s – 1870s, and maintaining silence altogether concerning Russification, Abkhazian intellectuals directed their anger most of all against the policy of Georgianization, which was initially implemented by the Georgian Church, continued by the Georgian Socialists (Men'sheviks) in 1918-1921, and then elaborated by Lavrenty Beria. While extensively discussing the political history of Abkhazia during the Soviet era, the authors tried to demonstrate that, in contrast to many other republics and against its people's will, Abkhazia lost its initial political status during the first two Soviet decades. It was demoted from an independent republic to a treaty republic and, finally, to an autonomous republic within Georgia. They blamed Georgian nationalism for this, as if it had aimed at the destruction of Abkhazian self-awareness and worked toward the complete assimilation of the Abkhazian people. In order to achieve this goal, they said, Georgian authorities did their best to establish a monopoly of Georgian language and culture over Abkhazia, to impose upon the general public the idea that Abkhazia was an integral part of Georgia, to resettle a substantial Georgian population in the territory of Abkhazia, and at the same time, to eliminate Abkhazian intellectuals physically, to deprive the Abkhazians of their distinct past, and to restrict the sphere of the Abkhazian language. All of this they did under demagogic slogans about the everlasting friendship of the Georgian and the Abkhazian people!

The Abkhazian authors pointed out that, whereas this policy was recognized as

harmful, it kept being implemented over the following decades, until perestroika, albeit in a somewhat eased form. In particular, they paid a lot of attention to the idea that the population of the Gali region had suffered especially intense pressure from the officials. The authorities did advise people there to record themselves as “Georgians”, for that provided certain privileges to them in terms of education, jobs and careers. The authors of the letter also pointed to the political connotation of the hypothesis of the Iberian-Caucasian family of languages. If Abkhazian was viewed as being related to Georgian, then it was not difficult to transfer it to the category of a “dialect” and to introduce Georgian as the language of instruction at school, as had been done with the Mingrelian and Svan languages⁸⁹).

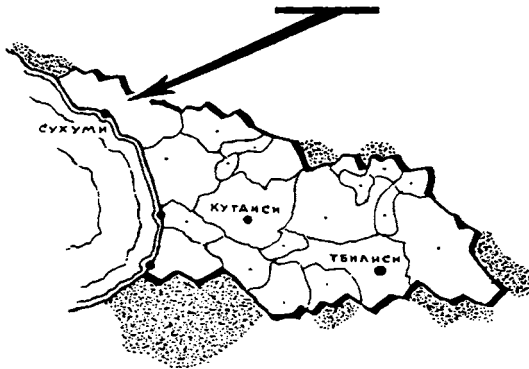
One of the major points that irritated the Abkhazians was the Georgiocentric approach to the history of Abkhazia and the Abkhazians that was manifested especially clearly by Ingoroqva. Abkhazian authors pointed out that, although it was condemned officially in the 1950s, this approach was shared by many Georgian scholars, who followed it in their historical perspectives, and included Abkhazia into Georgia, the homeland of the ethnic Georgians. In the Abkhazian view, recent Georgian studies of the history of Abkhazia in fact manifested the continuation of the struggle which was and is still being waged against the Abkhazian people, the struggle for “legal confirmation of the historical right of Georgia and the Georgian people to appropriate this country which is called Abkhazia”. Thus, for them, Georgian historiography was not common scholarship but an “elaborate geopolitical doctrine” aimed at the establishment of a “Greater Georgia” in the future (Marykhuba 1994a: 420-425).

It is worth noting that “Greater Georgia” was not an Abkhazian fantasy. At the Symposium of Rustaveli held in Turku, Finland, one could see a map of historical Georgia that included certain regions that made up parts of contemporary Turkey, Russia, Armenia and Azerbaijan. Since the fall of 1988, this map has proved to be very popular among Georgian politicians and intellectuals. It was extensively disseminated in Georgia, and Zviad Gamsakhurdia showed it to foreign journalists in the summer of 1989 (for example, see Hewitt 1996: 196, note 16). It is still popular in post-communist Georgia (map 21).

The Georgians paid a lot of attention to the “Abkhazian letter”, and it was severely criticized by the First secretary of the CC CPG, D. P. Patiashvili, at the session of the Supreme Soviet of the Georgian SSR (Patiashvili 1989: 2). After an order by the Georgian authorities, Georgian scholars including several Academicians and corresponding members of the Georgian Academy of Sciences, have compiled an extensive response (Po povodu 1989). While using skillfully the weakest points of their opponents (for example, their references to Turchaninov’s works), Georgian scholars made labored to prove the major ideas of Georgian historiography. That is, they defended the Colchis Kingdom and its “Georgian” inhabitants, the arrival of the Abkhazian ancestors in this territory only in the first centuries of the Christian era, the “west Georgian” character of the Abkhazian Kingdom, the domination of the Kartvelian population there, etc. They made

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ПРЕЛЮДИЯ ТРАГЕДИИ АБХАЗИИ



Map 21 The title page of Chabukiani's book "Prelude to the Abkhazian tragedy" with a map of Greater Georgia

attempts to demonstrate that, even after the united Georgian state had collapsed in the 13th century, Abkhazia was still subordinated to certain Georgian kingdoms or principalities and had never achieved true independence. The Georgian response contained Ingoroqva's idea of the devastating invasion by the highlanders in the 17th century and the consequent crucial transformation of the ethnocultural environment of Abkhazia.

The Georgian authors did their best to deny any attempts to Georgianize the Abkhazians. They referred either to the sympathy of Georgian democrats, such as Iliа Chavchavadze, towards the Abkhazians, or to the class policy of the Democratic Republic of Georgia in 1918-1921, as though it had lacked any ethnic flavor, or to the willingness of the Abkhazian authorities of the 1920s, as though they had demonstrated by themselves the aspiration to join Georgia. If Georgian authors did recognize anything fair in the Abkhazian letter, it was the anti-Abkhazian policy of 1937-1953. Yet, avoiding going deeper into that, they pointed out that the Georgians themselves suffered repressions in those days. They referred to the deportation of the Meskhetian Turks and the "Mingrelian affair". However, the Meskhetian Turks were deported because, being Muslims, they were not

considered true Georgians (For this reason they are still unable to come back to their homeland). The underlying cause of the “Mingrelian affair” was that L. Beria, then the head of the secret police (NKVD), had surrounded himself with Mingrelians, which provoked the suspicions of Stalin. Thus, the “Mingrelian affair” had nothing to do with Georgians proper.

Moreover, while manipulating national census data, which will be discussed in detail further on, Georgian authors attempted to downplay the number of Abkhazians. To achieve this end, they defined ethnicity through spoken language rather than self-identification. They went so far as to suggest that everyone with a Georgian-sounding last name should be considered Georgian. They worked hard to disprove Abkhazian accusations about the Georgian Church’s aspiration to Georgianize the Abkhazians. They demonstrated that it was rather the Russian Orthodox Church that implemented the policy of Russification. In the same way, they defended the policy of the Democratic Republic of Georgia towards the Abkhazians in 1918-1921. They tried to place on Dmitri Gulia responsibility for the introduction of Georgian as the language of instruction in the Abkhazian schools in the 1940s. Naturally, they failed to mention that he was pressed to develop a new Abkhazian alphabet on the basis of the Georgian script by being threatened with repression. While ignoring many of the fair critical remarks and demands of the Abkhazians, Georgian authors accused them of ingratitude towards “Lenin’s national policy” and unwillingness to consider the “achievements of Soviet power”. Moreover, they blamed the Abkhazians for the construction of the myth of “Greater Abkhazia”.

As we shall see further on, beginning with 1989, all these arguments established the basis for an extensive propaganda campaign waged for several years in the Georgian media. This campaign was aimed at achieving independence and securing territorial integrity. That is why it was very important for Georgian authors to argue that the Georgians proved to be an indigenous population throughout all Georgian territory. For them, this was an important argument against any non-Georgian national autonomy there, as though the Georgians had suffered discrimination from dominant minorities there. Indeed, the structure of national representation developed during the Soviet era was by no means perfect, but Georgian authors intentionally exaggerated the situation. They insisted that, in certain areas, the non-indigenous population had turned into a dominant majority, which, in their view, threatened the indigenous people, i.e. the Georgians (for example, see Gotsiridze 1989). The Georgians were especially alarmed by the aspiration of the ethnic minorities (Armenians, Azeris, Greeks and the like) to establish their own political autonomies, which was openly manifested during perestroika. The Georgians treated that as a threat to Georgian territorial integrity. To prevent the disintegration of the state, Georgian democrats believed it was reasonable to dissolve the former ethnic autonomies within the territory of Georgia. This was the core issue, which provoked hot discussions of the notion of “indigenous/non-indigenous” in 1989-1990 and caused the abolition of one of the

autonomies in very late 1990, the South Ossetian Autonomous Region. Needless to say, historical arguments played a major role in all those disputes.

One should acknowledge that both the Georgian and the Abkhazian arguments contained a grain of truth. Yet, it is also obvious that, in their aspiration to avoid addressing the hottest issues, Georgian authors ignored certain important facts, made doubtful interpretations of evidence, and shifted the emphasis. In any case, passions reached their climax by 1989. The Abkhazians were especially alarmed by the chauvinist propaganda launched by numerous informal Georgian movements and shared by many Georgian cultural activists. The latter's ideas were disseminated by the Georgian media, in particular, such newspapers popular among the intellectuals as "Literaturuli Sakartvelo" ("Literary Georgia"), "Narodnoe obrazovanie" ("Public education"), "Molodezh Gruzii" ("Georgian Youth") and the like. For example, in the fall of 1988, "Literaturuli Sakartvelo" published the slogan, "Georgia for the Georgians" for the first time, and appreciated such reasoning as "there should not be anything un-Georgian in Georgia" (cited from Obrashchenie 1989. Also see, Cheremin 1991; Goldenberg 1994: 95; Lakoba 2001a, 2001b)⁹⁰). In order to understand the message, one has to bear in mind that the Georgian expression for Georgia is "Sakartvelo" which means "the country of the Kartvelians", i.e. excludes the "Mingrelians" and "Svans", let alone the "Abkhazians" (Garakanidze 1959: 19; Hewitt 1995a: 303). Whereas for the Georgians, addressing the history of the Democratic Republic of Georgia was an important symbol of their struggle for sovereignty, the Abkhazians treated this as the restoration of the nationalist policy of the Men'sheviks, which discriminated against ethnic minorities. They were alarmed by the future of the Abkhazian autonomy especially as there were claims among the Georgian nationalists for the abolition of all autonomies. That is why the Abkhazians were frightened of the development of the Georgian democratic movement, and they attempted to break up democratic meetings in support of Georgian independence, as happened in Gagra on May 26, 1990 (for that, see V Abkhazskom obkome 1989; T. Shamba 1989; Lomsadze, Sinel'nikov 1990; Cheremin 1991; Lakoba 2001b).

While being aware of these Abkhazian attitudes, the Georgian democrats did their best to intensify propaganda about their ideas in Abkhazia and to involve the Abkhazians in joint actions against the "imperialist policies of Russia". Yet, the Abkhazians did not trust them; they were indignant at the many chauvinist slogans of the Georgian democrats, especially the latter's aspirations to associate their movement with the Democratic Republic of Georgia (for example, to use its black, white and claret colored banner, the portrait of its leader Noy Zhordania, etc.). The Abkhazians made many attempts to counteract them, and there were clashes between them and the Georgian democrats (Shnirelman 1989a)⁹¹).

In the meantime, in the spring of 1989, Georgian authorities manifested a special passion for the historical symbols of the Georgian nation, which were regarded very emotionally by many Georgians. On February 8, 1989, all Georgia (including South Ossetia!) had celebrated the 900-year anniversary of the David the

Builder's enthroning. The next day, the foundation of a monument to him was laid in the center of Tbilisi. On February 21, the newspaper, "Zaria Vostoka", published a draft of the "State program for the protection and usage of the monuments of Georgian history and culture", elaborated by order of the CC CPG. After that time, the newspaper began publishing photographs of the most important architectural monuments of medieval Georgia, accompanied by short descriptions of their significance. Finally, on April 24, 1990, the CC CPG, the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet, and the Soviet of Ministers of the Georgian SSR passed a decree: "On the state program for scholarly studies, teaching and popularization of the history of Georgia". All of these demonstrated what a great importance the Georgian authorities attached to history as a significant symbol of both the Georgian state and nation.

Simultaneously, articles were published intensely focused on the formation of the Georgian nation and the history of the Georgian state. It is worth noting that, in this context, the nation was treated in a flat primordialist way. The later viewpoint was at the core of a book by the Georgian philosopher, N. Natadze, published by the Georgian Academy of Sciences, where the author identified a nation with an entity based on blood relationships rather on common territory, language and culture (for that, see Charachidze 1989: 13). While manifesting this sort of approach, the authors of various articles in the Georgian media were searching deep in prehistory for the roots of the "Georgian ethnos". In their representation, this ethnos was an everlasting one which, despite all enemies, developed towards closer integration and consolidation. The staff of the Institute of History, Archaeology and Ethnography of the Georgian Academy of Sciences kept maintaining that, after Georgia was united in the 11th – 12th centuries, the term "Kartvelians" had enjoyed inclusive meaning and covered the Mingrelians, Svans and other groups, and that "Sakartvelo" became the name of the whole country. They argued that the united Georgian Kingdom embraced almost all of the Caucasus (Koranashvili 1989a; Tukhashvili 1989; Gvasalia 1991b). Yet, they failed to mention the role of the Abkhazians in the process of unification, and did not use the term "Abkhazia", either.

True, one of these authors, the philosopher G. Koranashvili, suddenly remembered that the Abkhazians had made an important contribution to the political unification of the country in the 9th – 10th centuries. He did his best to demonstrate that there had never been any tensions between the Abkhazians and the Georgians. He explained all the misfortunes of the Abkhazian people with reference to, first, the policy of Russification implemented by the Tzarist government, and second, the actions of the Georgian authorities during the Stalin era. He even recognized the distortions of history that were characteristic of certain Georgian authors, and Ingoroqva most of all. At the same time, he remarked that this competition was commenced by the Abkhazians themselves in the 1920s, and he referred to Ashkhatsava's and Basaria's publications, with which we are already familiar (Koranashvili 1989b). Thus, Koranashvili was one of only a few Georgian

authors who openly recognized the confrontation between the Georgian and the Abkhazian ethnocentric views of the past. Certain other Georgian authors went even further and accused the Abkhazian historians of “stirring up anti-Georgian hysteria” (Gamakhiria, Chania 1991b: 1).

Meanwhile, Koranashvili was immediately challenged by the historian K. Tskitishvili, who thoroughly reproduced Ingoroqva’s view of the Abkhazian people’s origins and called Ingoroqva the “great scholar” and the “last encyclopedist”. Moreover, whereas, in order to distance himself from Ingoroqva, Koranashvili had referred to such advocates of the idea of the “dual aboriginality” as Dzhavakhishvili, Dzhanashia and Melikishvili, Tskitishvili based his views on the ideas of those who shared Ingoroqva’s approach, N. Berdzenishvili, Yu. Kocharava, Sh. Meskhia, M. Lordkipanidze, and Sh. Shanidze (Tskitishvili 1989). Thus, it turned out that Georgian historiography itself was by no means highly consolidated. Yet, the newspaper “Youth of Georgia”, that had arranged the discussion, proved to be most sympathetic to Tskitishvili and like-minded scholars. Indeed, he argued that Abkhazia was a permanent part of Georgia, that its borders extended to Tuapse, that the contemporary Abkhazians were descendants of Adyghe newcomers, and that there had been no need to reorganize the Sukhumi Pedagogical Institute into the Abkhazian State University in 1978.

This approach predominated in the Georgian mass media in 1989-1990. It appealed to history and, following Ingoroqva, represented the Abkhazians as recent newcomers in the “Georgian land” (Dzebisashvili 2000: 154). By that time, the Georgian public had already rehabilitated Ingoroqva, and the street where the Institute of Linguistics of the Georgian Academy of Sciences was situated was named after him (Hewitt 1995b: 59, 61, 1998: 120). On March 30, 1989, a corresponding member of the Georgian Academy of Sciences, S. Tsaishvili, made a speech on Georgian radio. In it he said: “Unfortunately, those who promote these disuniting trends (he meant the growth of Georgian-Abkhazian tensions, V. Sh.) forget about our historical heritage, forget about how those Abkhazian tribes, who call themselves the Abkhazian tribe, arrived in Abkhazia. Yet, they might have had another name in the past. They forget how they moved here to the Black Sea seashore, how they were welcomed by the Georgian people, local Georgian people who lived in this territory, and made them their brothers and relatives... Instead of being familiar with their past, with this historical lesson, they began to demonstrate their hegemonistic claims to this very territory which is nowadays called Abkhazia ...” (cited from *Istoricheskaiia spravka* 1989). It is worth noting that this speech was given on the next day after Patiashvili’s speech at a session of the Supreme Soviet of Georgia. It is obvious that the campaign was arranged from the top levels of power.

The central Georgian media developed the same ideas. In May 1989, the newspaper “*Akhalgazdra komunisti*” (“Young Communist”) read: “While using our millennial kindness, with our polite permission, the Adyghe tribes (Apsilae and Abasgoi) arrived from the northern Caucasus about two centuries ago, and we

settled them in the heart of our Georgian land... The tribes who came as guests called themselves by the name of the earliest Georgian tribe, the Abasgoi, and, becoming impudent because of our simple-heartedness, they imposed the Adyghe language upon the Georgian Abkhazians who, for millennia, were unable to pronounce any sound in any other language but Georgian. Today, the newcomer from over the mountains who enveloped our national body like ivy claims our land” (Kakhidze et al. 1989)⁹².

Unfortunately, certain Georgian historians also took part in this anti-Abkhazian campaign, launched by the Georgian media. N. Pirtskhalava depicts the early 1990s as a period of “nationalist obscurantism” when many Georgian intellectuals emphasized a romantic image of the glorious past instead of analyzing contemporary processes (Pirtskhalava 1997: 189-192). For example, Professor N. Yu. Lomouri put forward his own view of the ethnogenetic development at the Black Sea region of Georgia. He assumed that the ancestors of both the Georgians and the “Circassian-Adyghes” lived there in classical and early medieval times, and that the Abkhazians proper arrived there much later. He believed that the latter were to a major extent linked to the flow of the highlanders’ population in the 16th – 17th centuries (Lomouri 1989)⁹³. True, while responding to critical remarks by Inal-Ipa, he recognized that the term “Circassian-Adyghes” was an unsuitable one, and replaced it with the more appropriate term, the “Abkhazian-Adyghes”. At the same time, despite declaring his disassociation from Ingoroqva’s concepts, that did not affect his reasoning that the Apsilae and the Abasgoi were included in the “Georgian ethnic entity”. It did not keep him from saying that according to physical anthropological data, they were close to the Georgians and differed from the contemporary Adyghes, or that the Abkhazian language was brought to Abkhazia by the highlanders in the 16th – 17th centuries (Lomouri 1990: 161, 169-171). To put it differently, he offered Ingoroqva’s own schema, slightly revised. This schema was also picked up by certain Georgian archaeologists (for example, see Akhalkatsi 1990) who attempted to introduce the highly politicized term, the “Apswas”, insulting to the Abkhazians (for that, see Inal-Ipa 1989b: 4) into the scholarship.

While pointing to the ethnocentric approach in the interpretation of early history that was characteristic of Abkhazian historiography, the Georgian historians themselves also proved unable to avoid ethnocentrism, and when they criticized the Abkhazians, they demonstrated the same methodological errors. For example, Professor Lomouri remarked that the idea of an extensive Abkhazian-Adyghe settlement in the Black Sea region in the distant past was but a linguistic hypothesis and could not serve as the basis for any strong conclusions. At the same time, he himself rested on no less hypothetical idea, that of the early settlement of the Svan and Mingrelian-Chan tribes there. Moreover, proceeding from contemporary reality, he considered them to be Kartvelians (Lomouri 1990: 163-166), although in the strict ethnic sense the term “Kartvelians” was reserved for the population of eastern Georgia alone. Yet, this inclusive usage of the term let him and other Georgian authors argue that the Kartvelians had lived on the east Black Sea coast from time

immemorial, and, naturally, this provoked only a negative response from the Abkhazians. Besides, Lomouri used archaeological data incorrectly. He viewed the dolmen culture of Abkhazia as a variant of the Colchian culture, which was inaccurate. However, this approach towards the archaeological picture was very important to him, for he identified the Colchis culture with the Georgian ethnos, and this let him maintain demographic and cultural Georgian domination in Colchis in the Early Iron Age. He did not stop at that. As he said, the inclusive term "Colchians" embraced the Apsilae and the Abasgoi, as well as many others. Indeed, in his view, they were also the bearers of an all-Georgian cultural heritage (Lomouri 1990: 161, 167-69). There was no space for the authentic Abkhazian culture in this schema. The Abkhazians could not submit to that.

Other arguments were picked up by the Georgian media as well. Thus, P. Topuria convinced his readers that it was beneficial for Abkhazia to stay within Georgia. Indeed, he reasoned, the Abkhazian ethnos was less socially advanced and unready for state life. He warned the Abkhazians in a "friendly" way that, if they broke away from Georgia, they would "move along the wrong route of ethnic development" (Topuria 1989).

All of this was an almost literal reproduction of the historical approach that in 1989 formed the very bedrock of the basic political documents of the Georgian radicals. One of their leaders was Zviad K. Gamsakhurdia, a former human rights activist and an active member of the Georgian Helsinki group, a well-known writer and lecturer at Tbilisi State University, and the future first president of independent Georgia. In the very late 1980s, Gamsakhurdia's name became the symbol of those who struggled for the independence of Georgia (Jones 1994: 135-136; Goldenberg 1994: 82, 90). All his words were listened to, and people were ready to follow him. He fascinated even officials of the CC CPG. In the meantime, in order to confirm his geopolitical ambitions, Gamsakhurdia referred to Ingoroqva's ideas.

In 1989, in his well-known open letter to the Academician Andrei D. Sakharov, he maintained first, that "Abkhazia was... part of Colchis, one of the earliest Georgian states" in the 1st Millennium B.C. Second, the name "Abkhazia" often stood for Georgia in medieval times. Third, "in the New Time (this term was commonly applied to the 17th – 19th centuries in the Soviet historical tradition. V. Sh.) they began to use the term "Abkhazians", albeit incorrectly, to stand for the North Caucasian, Adygheian tribe of Apswa, related to the Circassians, who began to conquer the northern mountainous part of historical Abkhazia, assimilated its Georgian population and became firmly established there". Gamsakhurdia had coined the name "Apswas" for the contemporary Abkhazians and compared them with the "Arabs who settled in the historical lands of Egypt and Israel". Finally, he treated national autonomies as an "obvious spot for Stalinist crimes against the peoples of the USSR" and believed that they had been established in order to stir up inter-ethnic hostility (Gamsakhurdia 1989; Akhalkatsi, Alashvili 1991). A collection of papers presented in the same style was published in 1989 by the magazine, "Matiane", issued by the Georgian Helsinki group, headed by Z. Gamsakhurdia (for

that, see Otyrba 1994: 308-309, note 4). Another member of the Helsinki group, M. Gagnidze, following Gamsakhurdia, argued that ethnic minority rights had never been encroached upon in Georgia. Rather, Georgians' rights had been damaged in Abkhazia (Gagnidze 1991).

All of this was meant to serve as instruction for political actions. In his special appeal "Letopis'-4" (1989), Gamsakhurdia called on the "Georgians of northwest Georgia" to use all means in the struggle against the "Apswa separatists". To begin with, he suggested, "one had to annex those areas of the Abkhazian ASSR which did not belong to Apsny in historical terms, and where the Apswa people accounted for lesser numbers, namely, the Gali, Gul'ripsh, Gagra, and Sukhumi regions, part of the Ochamchira region, as well as Sukhumi itself". While concluding his appeal to the Georgians of "northwest Georgia" (he deliberately used this term for Abkhazia. V. Sh.), he wrote with indignation: "The fact that 16 percent of the population sat at the head of 84 percent, caused all those illegal actions that one can observe in the Abkhazian ASSR" (*Istoricheskaiia spravka* 1989). Yet, he distorted both the numbers and their meaning. First, the Abkhazians accounted for 17.8 percent of the population of Abkhazia at that time. Second, Russians, Armenians, Greeks and other non-Georgians accounted for more than half of the rest of the population, who hardly shared Gamsakhurdia's ideas. Moreover, there were many Georgians in Abkhazia who supported the Abkhazians! It is also worth noting that Gamsakhurdia was excited by Beria's policy: "In 1936 – 1954, the domination of the separatists and Apswa violence against other nations living in the Abkhazian ASSR was stopped. Yet, in the year after Stalin's death the separatists did their best to take revenge and restore the situation that obtained in Lakoba's time" (*Istoricheskaiia spravka* 1989).

Gamsakhurdia's calls found their admirers. At a meeting in Sukhumi, the leader of the All-Georgian Shota Rustaveli Society, Akaki Bakradze, convinced the Mingrelians that they were the direct descendants of the early Abkhazians, who once lived on the Black Sea coast (Hewitt 1993: 283). While giving a talk at the Plenum of the CC CPG on September 19, 1989, the First Secretary of the CC CPG, G. G. Gumbaridze, vigorously reproduced the rhetoric of the Georgian radicals about domination of the Abkhazians in the power structures of Abkhazia (for that, see Lakoba 1990b. Also see Shakryl 1989; Adzhindzhal 1989). Even Gamsakhurdia's consistent opponent, the leader of the National-Democratic Party of Georgia, Giia Chanturia, believed that the Abkhazians had arrived in Abkhazia in the 18th century (Chanturia 1989).

True, after he was elected Chairman of the Supreme Soviet, and then President of Georgia, Gamsakhurdia radically revised his attitude toward the Abkhazians. He demonstrated that for the first time in March 1991. At that time, on March 17, an All-Union referendum on the future of the USSR was held. Gamsakhurdia declared that a referendum on Georgian independence would be arranged on March 31, instead. In order to achieve success he sought for the support of ethnic minorities, and was ready to promise them a lot for it. While attempting to prevent the

Abkhazians from participation in the All-Union referendum, he emphasized the “common Colchian origin” and the “genetic relationships” between the Abkhazians and Georgians, as well as their common history and culture. Demonstrating Caucasian courtliness, he recognized the great prestige of the Abkhazian image among the Georgians and talked of the chivalrously gracious behavior of the Abkhazians. He was now inclined to view them as an “indigenous population”, albeit in the context of the concept of “dual aboriginality”. After that time, he placed the blame for the turmoil in Abkhazia on the “imperialist policies of Russia” and the “adventurism” of Abkhazian official leaders, headed by Ardzinba (Gamsakhurdia 1991a). The wave of anti-Abkhazian propaganda in the Georgian media eased⁹⁴). Yet, this was obviously related not so much to a radical change of policy on the “Abkhazian issue” as to that fact that the “Ossetian issue” had become of major importance by that time, and the Georgian media were ordered to launch an anti-Ossetian campaign. At the same time, while taking part in the presidential elections, Gamsakhurdia included in his political program a promise to secure the status of the Abkhazian autonomous republic within Georgia (Gamsakhurdia 1991b: 2) and confirmed this intention in his speeches (for example, see Gamsakhurdia 1991c). Concerning the Abkhazian claims for the separation of Georgia, Gamsakhurdia was ready to acknowledge their right to self-determination, albeit ... on the other side of the Great Caucasian ridge (Nodia 1998: 27-28).

In the meantime, the former attitude of the Georgian authorities towards the Abkhazians as a “non-indigenous” population was not forgotten. It revived after the fall of Gamsakhurdia’s regime. For example, in his talk at the U.K. Parliament in London on November 23, 1992, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, A. Chikvaidze, referred to the Argonaut myth and maintained that only Georgians lived in Colchis at that time (Hewitt 1993: 312). All of this was intended to substantiate Georgian rights to Abkhazian territory.

Another Georgian politician also shared the Georgian radical view of Colchis history. He was T. V. Nadareishvili, a former KGB officer and the Second Secretary of the Gagra local Branch of the CPG. In the post-Soviet era, he was a member of the Georgian Cabinet of Ministers, Deputy Chairman of the Supreme Soviet of Abkhazia between December 1991 and August 1992, then Chairman of the Supreme Soviet of Abkhazia in exile, and simultaneously a major-general of the Georgian troops. He was an active participant in the Georgian-Abkhazian war of 1992 – 1993, during which time he acted as Chairman of the Georgian Soviet for the Defense of Abkhazia. In his book focused on the “genocide in Abkhazia” he argued the blood relationships between the Georgians and the Abkhazians, and accused the “Abkhazian separatists” of ignorance of this simple “historical truth”, as though this had caused them to commit “crimes against humanity”. He also accused Abkhazian scholars of falsifying the history of the Abkhazian people, in order to “artificially isolate the Abkhazians from the unified Georgian organism”. He maintained that, “if the Abkhazians knew their genuine history, they would never attack the Georgians, and would be Georgian patriots, instead”. Nadareishvili

himself thoroughly adhered to Ingoroqva's ideas and argued that the first Abkhazians were Georgians and that, until the 17th century, only Georgian political formations flourished in the east Black Sea region, where Georgian speech was heard and the Georgian culture predominated. Yet, he complained, unfortunately the region became the target of mass migrations by the Adyghe-Circassian highlanders in the 17th century, when local inhabitants were partly assimilated, and this resulted in cultural decline and tremendous cultural changes. This was when Abkhazian alienation from the Georgians commenced (Nadareishvili 1996: 5-12).

Yet, Nadareishvili claimed, Abkhazia was always an integral part of Georgia, and there had never been any non-Georgian state there. That is why, he said, the Abkhazian monopoly on political power in Abkhazia was intolerable (Nadareishvili 1996: 32). His goal, he declared, was the "revival of Georgian genes and spirit" in Abkhazia. In fact, the approach, which was advocated by this contemporary Georgian politician, obviously demonstrated the chauvinist nature of Ingoroqva's concept and the fruits of its political use. Apparently, being implemented, this concept would turn the Abkhazians into a silent and discriminated-against minority in the land where their ancestors had lived for centuries.

Interesting to note, in contrast to many other Georgian authors, Nadareishvili was well aware of the ideological messages of various versions of the past. Apparently, his experience of serving at the KGB and in Communist Party structures helped him a lot with that. He understood fairly well that building a distinct view of their past on the part of an ethnic minority and especially teaching it at school, promotes the rapid growth of ethnic self-awareness and inspires a feeling of isolation from the dominant majority. The former resentment is also revived, and building an enemy image in the person of the dominant majority is facilitated (Nadareishvili 1996: 5-6, 33-34).

That is why both early and medieval history play major roles in the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict and are referred to extensively in the context of the ideological warfare waged by both sides. Many Georgian intellectuals take an active part in that; although far from the historical field, they consider it an important patriotic action to display their solidarity with the Georgian view of history. A booklet of this sort was published in Kutaisi, with the support of the governor of Imereti Province and the mayor of the city of Kutaisi, T. Shashiashvili. Its author, a Doctor of Technology, R. R. Chabukiani, was willing to "unmask Apswa (Abkhazian) separatism" and to prove the historical unity of the Georgians and the Abkhazians. He attached great importance to the fact that his booklet was published in Kutaisi, the "early Georgian-Abkhazian capital".

In this booklet, he wrote of the Iberian state as if Homer had already known it (? V. Sh.), and of a Pontic state that was a part of the "Hellenistic Georgian world" (? V. Sh.). Moreover, he recalled Turchaninov's "discoveries" and maintained that both the Maikop and the Sukhumi inscriptions were left by the Mingrelian and Svan ancestors, as though the latter were the builders of the early Colchis state (Chabukiani 1995: 5-6, 20). He opposed the medieval Abkhazians, i.e. the

descendants of the Apsilae and the Abasgoi, to the contemporary “Adyghe-Apswas” and argued that the former had always constituted a majority in Abkhazia, whereas the latter had arrived there only in the 16th century. He went so far as to claim that, in their own language, the Abkhazians (Apswas) were the Abazins rather than the Abkhazians”. Following Ingoroqva, M. Lordkipanidze and Mibchvani, he identified the medieval “Abkhazians” with the Georgians and maintained that the “Apswas” had appropriated the name “Abkhazians” after they resettled in the Georgian province of Abkhazeti. Moreover, he accused the latter of occupying themselves with the “Apswaization” of the indigenous Abkhazians, who were of Mingrelian and Svan origin in fact (Chabukiani 1995: 16, 19). He needed all of this in order to state that the “Georgians and Abkhazians (but not Apswas) were the indigenous population of Abkhazia” (Chabukiani 1995: 33-36).

He believed that the Abkhazians were always members of some Georgian political formation, be it the “Egrisi-Abkhazian” unity of the 4th – 6th centuries, or the Abkhazian Kingdom, or the Mingrelian Principality. He glorified the Abkhazian Kings for their promotion of Georgian culture as well as their sincere service to Georgian interests. He maintained that the peoples of historical Georgia always demonstrated an aspiration for unification and that even the banner of the Abkhazian Principality, similar to those of Imereti and Guria, was evidence of their common state. He also recalled that the Abkhazians, with the Georgians, had revolted against the Turkish yoke (Chabukiani 1995: 5-8). To put it in other words, like Nadareishvili, he objected to any Abkhazian authenticity and viewed the medieval Abkhazian culture as in essence “Georgian”. Yet, he had introduced some distinctions. While insisting on the identity of both the Georgians and the “true Abkhazians” in culture, he opposed them to the “Apswas” who were represented as savages, far from genuine civilization. He enumerated their “sins”: they had lacked any writing system until very recently, they had failed to create any great literary or architectural work, they were far from any “civilized religion” and worshiped idols (Chabukiani 1995: 25-26). Yet, while making all these charges, Chabukiani demonstrated his ignorance. First, while pointing to the lack of mosques in Abkhazia, he failed to mention that they had been destroyed by the Georgian Men’sheviki in 1918. Second, while stating scornfully that a smithy was worshipped by the “Apswa”, whereas that practice was unknown among the “true Abkhazians”, he challenged the Svan historian, T. Mibchvani who, on his side, was proud of the traditional worship of iron and smithies among the Svans (Mibchvani 1989a: 223-237).

Paying no attention to the dramatic Abkhazian history, Chabukiani arrogantly claimed that many Abkhazians were incompetent in their mother tongue, and represented them as if they were the “only people who lacked secondary education in their own language”. He also emphasized their poorer “intellectual abilities”, in contrast to the Georgians (Chabukiani 1995: 19, 49-50). He failed to mention though, that Abkhazian schools had been closed down and that forcible Georgianization of the Abkhazians had been implemented from 1937 to 1953. Yet,

none of this stopped him from making the statement that there had not been any oppression of ethnic minorities in Georgia (Chabukiani 1995: 23). Moreover, he went so far as to explain “maxadzhistvo” by referring to lack of feeling for their Motherland on the part of the “Apswas-Abkhazians”. He cited the example of the “true Abkhazians” and the Georgians of Samurzaqano who stayed in their region at that time (Chabukiani 1995: 22, 48). Yet, he was not sincere here either. His reader would never realize from his report that the Muslims were exiled, rather than the Christians who accounted for the bulk of the Samurzaqano population!

Like Nadareishvili, Chabukiani was emphatically struggling against the Abkhazian view of the past. He labored to demonstrate that Georgians alone had created the whole east Black Sea region’s culture. Moreover, he accused the Abkhazians of the intentional destruction of Georgian historical monuments and Georgian place names in the territory of Abkhazia (Chabukiani 1995: 29-30). Finally, he deprived the Abkhazians of political initiative and maintained that Abkhazian separatism was encouraged by “Georgian renegades” who had once fled to Abkhazia and accepted Abkhazian identity in order to find good careers (Chabukiani 1995: 37, 49). It is worth mentioning that Chabukiani did not restrict himself to the struggle for Abkhazian territory. He recalled all the other lands that, in his view, had been forcibly annexed from historical Georgia by neighboring states (Chabukiani 1995: 15, table 3), and it was no accident that the cover of his booklet was decorated by a map of “Greater Georgia”.

All of these historical constructions of Georgian politicians and patriotic intellectuals were based on official Georgian scholarship represented, in particular, by a corresponding member of the Georgian Academy of Sciences, the Chairperson of the Department of Georgian History of Tbilisi State University, Marika Lordkipanidze, a specialist in the early medieval history of Georgia. Very active in the political discussions of the late 1980s – early 1990s, she vigorously repeated the ideas both of the indigenous origin of the Georgians in Colchis and the late arrival there of the ancestors of the contemporary Abkhazians. She ardently advocated these ideas to various audiences (M. Lordkipanidze 1989, 1990)⁹⁵. She doubted that the early medieval Apsilae and Abasgoi could be identified with the ancestors of the contemporary Abkhazians, and preferred to view them as early Kartvelians. In her opinion, one had to distinguish between the local early Abkhazians and the “Apswas” who had arrived much later and given birth to the contemporary Abkhazians. She was inclined to identify with the Georgians not only the early Abkhazians but also other tribes (Sanigai, Misimianoi and the like) of early Colchis whose ethnic identities were quite obscure and the subject of continuing controversy. Following Ingoroqva, she insisted that the ancestors of the contemporary Abkhazians were backward highlanders who flooded Abkhazia in the 17th century after the region was “cleansed” of Georgians by Turkish raiders. She needed these ideas as a basis for presenting the Georgians as not only the indigenous population but as the dominant majority from very early times (Lordkipanidze 1990: 58-59)⁹⁶.

She developed the same views even more energetically and peremptorily in contemporary independent Georgia. Nowadays, she also brings in the Colchis archaeological culture of the Late Bronze – Early Iron Age, which in her publications turns into a “Kartvelian culture”. She maintains unreservedly that both the early Greek Argonaut myth and the early classical authors provide evidence in favor of the deep roots of the Kartvelian language in the southeast Black Sea region. It turns out that the Kartvelians lived throughout the coastal region as far as Tuapse in the northwest during the classical period. Although she recognizes the obscurity of the Apsilae and Abasgoi ethnic affiliation, she herself gravitates towards Ingoroqva’s ideas. In any case, she says, their territory was permanently part of certain Georgian states (Lordkipanidze 1995). At the turn of the 1990s, the philologist, A. Oniani disseminated Ingoroqva’s ideas, although he generously dated the Abkhazian arrival to Abkhazia to the 15th rather than the 17th century (Oniani 1990. For that, see Hewitt 1996: 198).

The problem of the Abkhazian Kingdom, its builders and the ethnic composition of its population is still a matter of very hot dispute between Georgian and Abkhazian intellectuals. At the turn of the 1990s, M. Lordkipanidze was probably the major ardent proponent of the Georgian view of this issue. This she manifested not only in her chapters in the aforementioned textbook on the history of Abkhazia and chapters in the fundamental multi-volume “History of Georgia” (Melikishvili, Lordkipanidze 1989) but also in her popular publications and talks for the public at large (M. Lordkipanidze 1989, 1990, 1995). She claimed that the “Abkhazian Kingdom was a Georgian state, as regards the vast majority of the population, language, culture, writing system and state policy...” (M. Lordkipanidze 1990: 43, 1995: 7. Also see Totadze 1994: 22-23). To put it differently, she derived the Georgian identity of the Abkhazian Kingdom directly from the idea that Georgians accounted for the bulk of the population there, that there was a Georgian Church with a liturgy in Georgian, that the Georgian language enjoyed state status, and that masterpieces of Georgian literature and architecture were created in Abkhazia at that time. She cited the Academician Berdzenishvili: “The early Abkhazians, be they of Kartvelian origin or not, were the same Georgians in history and culture as the Egris, Svans, Kartes, Kakhis and all the Kartvelian ethnic groups, and took part in the building of the Georgian state and Georgian culture together with all the Kartvelian tribes” (M. Lordkipanidze 1995: 9).

It is easy to see that, in this context, the term “Georgian” (“Kartvelian”) was granted a civic rather than an ethnic meaning. Yet, neither was this approach able to satisfy the Abkhazians, for the views in question pictured them constructing an alien state and developing an alien culture. Moreover, even their very name was appropriated by this state and its culture. Indeed, as Lordkipanidze taught, the entire population of the state, including both the Georgians and Abkhazians, were called the “Abkhazians”, after the name of the state. That is why it was so difficult to discuss the ethnic identities of the various groups mentioned by the medieval authors in its territory. While recognizing this fact, Lordkipanidze still argued that

the terms “Abkhazia” and “Abkhazians” stood mainly for “Georgia” and “Georgians”, both in medieval Georgian and in foreign sources (M. Lordkipanidze 1990: 46-47).

Besides, M. Lordkipanidze claimed that the ethnic identity of the early Abkhazian Kings was obscure. In her view, the title “Abkhazian King” only meant that the dynasty originated in the country of Abkhazia. In fact, the kings could have been of either Greek or Georgian ethnic origin. However, she insisted that the kings of the Abkhazians were Georgians in terms of culture and language (M. Lordkipanidze 1990: 43. Also see Totadze 1994: 22-23).

While depicting the Abkhazians as highlanders from the north who brought their alien culture and their “Apswa” name to the local people, she granted these aliens with “Georgian self-awareness” and complained that, in the 19th century, Russian authorities “bent their efforts to replace Georgian self-awareness with an Abkhazian (Apswa) one”. Against all logic, she tried to convince the reader that progressive Abkhazians had objected to this policy (M. Lordkipanidze 1995: 9).

M. Lordkipanidze, who was awarded the title of Academician of the National Academy of Georgia in the new democratic Georgia, was by no means alone in her loyalty to orthodox Georgian historiography. Her approach was shared by many other Georgian Academicians. For example, in 1991, the well-known Georgian linguist, Academician Tomaz V. Gamkrelidze, put forward the idea that the term “abxaz” was in fact of west Kartvelian origin and initially was used as the name of a Kartvelian tribe, after which it was borrowed as the name for the whole country and its population. Only after the decline of the Abkhazian Kingdom was this term picked up by the local Apsilae, ancestors of the contemporary Abkhazians (Gamkrelidze 1991)⁹⁷.

A collection of articles entitled “Georgia – ‘a small empire’?!” (1990) played a special role in the Georgian propaganda campaign, because well known Georgian scholars were among its authors. One of the latter was a corresponding member of the Academy of Sciences of the Georgian SSR, the new Director of the Institute of History, Archaeology and Ethnography, D. L. Muskhelishvili. In his article, he also reproduced all the main points of the concept of “dual aboriginality”. Those were the early presence of the Georgians (Colchian-Mingrelians, Svans, Meschi) in Colchis, the arrival of the Abasgoi and Apsilae in the 1st – 2nd centuries A.D., and the establishment of a political and ethnic boundary between them and the Mingrelians along the Kelasuri River. On his side, Muskhelishvili added that it was only the Abkhazians, rather than the Georgians, who first built up a “small empire”; and it was the Abkhazian Kings who, despite their different ethnic origin, accomplished the major Georgian task while contributing to the unification of Georgia and promoting the development of its culture. Like Dzhanaashia and M. Lordkipanidze, he argued that the Abkhazian Kings were Georgians with respect to culture and policy.

Thus, he maintained, it was not Georgia that had integrated Abkhazia in the medieval period but Abkhazia, which had conquered Georgia and shifted to the

Georgian culture. However, a radical change occurred in Abkhazia in the 17th century, due to the expansion of the Caucasian highlanders. The Mingrelian Prince Levan III Dadiani had built a huge defensive wall along the Kelasuri River in order to stop them, but this did not help much, and the Abkhazians had progressed as far as the Inguri River by the early 18th century. Nevertheless, despite all these disturbances, the former Georgian population had survived in southern Abkhazia, and the Abkhazian nobility cultivated Georgian culture even in the 19th century. The growth of Georgian-Abkhazian tensions was caused, in the author's view, first, by the colonial policy of the Russian Tzarist government. Second, they were fostered by blind attachment to this policy on the part of Soviet authorities, who viewed the Mingrelians, Svans, Gurians and other local groups (apparently, the author included the Abkhazians to this list. V. Sh.) of Georgian people as separate independent peoples (Muskhelishvili 1990). The author released the Georgian authorities from any responsibility, and presented the Georgians as internationalists in their hearts. He failed to explain how this corresponded to the ethnocide in Abkhazia in 1937-1953, which he acknowledged.

Another author of the same book, I. P. Antelava, attempted to develop a new approach. He broke away of the common Georgian belief in the equation of ethnic origin with cultural background. He made a distinction between these two notions that colored all his reasoning. He had no doubt that there were ethnic relationships between the early medieval Abasgoi-Apsilae and the contemporary Abkhazians. At the same time, he emphasized the striking cultural difference between them, namely, the "degradation of their respective traditions" among the latter. He appreciated the activities of the medieval Abkhazians, who united the country as "close kin" of the Georgians rather than as conquerors (Antelava 1990: 20-21). Yet, he forgot that he himself had written of the "struggle for a unified Georgia", and that the de facto unification of Georgia in the 9th – 10th century was by no means carried out peacefully.

Like Muskhelishvili (in fact, following Ingoroqva), he also told of a flood of highlanders coming with their "primitive culture" in the 15th century, and represented the Abkhazian-Mingrelian wars of the 17th century not as local strife but as a civilizational "struggle between the Georgian socio-political system and the primitive social system of the highlanders" (Antelava 1990: 23). The author accused the Soviet powers not only of granting the Abkhazians autonomy, but also of reallocating "genuine Georgian (Mingrelian) lands". Moreover, Antelava first formulated the notions of privileged Abkhazian status in Abkhazia; of Georgian renegades who identified themselves with the Abkhazians for career reasons; and of their active role in the promotion of "Abkhazian extremism" (Antelava 1990: 25). As we have seen, these ideas were greatly appreciated by Georgian nationalists, for example, by Chabukiani. Ultimately, Antelava insisted that all Abkhazian territory had to stay with Georgia. Concerning Abkhazian autonomy, he suggested that it must be restricted to the Gudauta region alone (Antelava 1990: 27).

In brief, this collection of papers, which greatly affected the Georgian public,

deprived the medieval Abkhazians of their own culture and presented them as blind actors who fulfilled the “Georgian task”. When at last they obtained their own culture, it proved to be “primitive” and unworthy of the builders of any state. It seemed natural to the authors that the “more civilized” Georgians should run all the regions of Georgia. Surprisingly, while being fascinated with their own ideas, the authors did not see any contradictions between Muskhelishvili’s idea that, on the one hand, the united Georgian state was constructed by the Abkhazians, and on the other hand, it was the result of the “creative activity of only one people – the Georgians” (Muskhelishvili 1990: 8-9, 18).

Over recent years, a lot of propaganda literature has been published in Georgia and abroad in order to disseminate all over the world the Georgian view of the past. In 1995, Georgian journalists published another collection of essays in St. Petersburg that contained the aforementioned article by M. Lordkipanidze, with others of this sort. For example, one of the authors strove to prove that most of the place names as well as early ethnic names in Abkhazia had nothing to do with the Abkhazian language and were related to Georgian, instead. In particular, he referred to the famous “Bichvinta”, isolated it from its Greek roots and, following Ingoroqva, suggested a Georgian etymology. Besides, he hinted at Kartvelian origins for Leon I and Leon II, the rulers who built the Abkhazian state (G. Pipiia 1995)⁹⁸.

Another article was completed by the journalist B. Pipiia, who not only shared the Georgian view of the past but also artificially reinforced its Georgiocentrism. First, he reproduced Ingoroqva’s idea that the Abkhazians were highlanders who descended from the hills in the 17th century, and insisted that Abkhazia had always constituted an integral part of the local Georgian state. Second, he represented Kelesh-bey as a Turkish protégé and his son – who murdered him – as a Russian agent⁹⁹. Third, he accused the Abkhazians of the Georgian-Abkhazian war with all its terrible results, and kept silence on the anti-Abkhazian propaganda that was carried out by both official and unofficial Georgian media at the turn of the 1990s (B. Pipiia 1995). The same book contained an article by the Georgian demographer, A. Totadze (Totadze 1995), which was a shortened version of his book to be discussed further on.

At the same time, an article by L. V. Marshania, published in the same book, was a sign of a certain shift in the attitude of Georgian intellectuals towards the Abkhazian issue. By that time, Marshania, born of an Abkhazian family, was an Academician at the Agrarian Academy of Georgia. In his life he had occupied several high positions. He was the first vice-chairman of the Soviet of Ministers of the Abkhazian ASSR, the Secretary of Ideology of the Abkhazian Branch of the CC CPG (during the period of turmoil of the very late 1970s!), vice-chairman of a department in the CC CPG, and the like. Although he shared the Georgian stance in general¹⁰⁰ and was angry with the “Abkhazian Separatists”, his article appreciated the Abkhazian view of the past. He depicted the Abkhazians as the earliest inhabitants of the east Black Sea region, called the Abkhazian Kingdom an

“Abkhazian-Georgian state”, and openly discussed the demographic disaster that had turned the Abkhazians into a numerical minority in their own land. He pointed out that any talk about the relative share of Abkhazian and Georgian elements in the overall population of Abkhazia hurt Abkhazian feelings, because everybody knew what development, in particular, had caused the drastic decline in the Abkhazian population. While condemning “Abkhazian separatists”, he was the only author in the book who mentioned “Georgian extremists” as well. Actually he accused both of them of the unfortunate break between the Georgians and Abkhazians. He was also the only one who wrote of the excesses of the Georgian military in Sukhumi in August 1992.

The problem was not only the murders, burning down of private houses and the pillage. In November 1992, Georgian fighters burned down the ARIHLL with its unique historical archive as well as its archaeological and ethnographic collections. The Central State Archive of Abkhazia, the Party Archive of the Abkhazian Branch of the CC CPG, the local Museum of History and Ethnography in Sukhumi were all destroyed, as well as schools, libraries and theaters (for that, see Marykhuba 1994a: 300, note 2; Lakoba 1995: 101; Colarusso 1995: 83). This was the punishment of Abkhazian history, an attempt to deprive the Abkhazians of historical memory.

While condemning the extremism on both sides, Marshania mostly addressed the Georgian intellectuals, who proved unable to ease the conflict, while supporting the slogan of abolishing Abkhazian autonomy. He recommended that they should recognize that the Abkhazians were a distinct people, and it made no sense to confuse them with Georgians, as it was common for many Georgian ideologists and political activists to do. Moreover, he openly accused the Georgian military of pillage and crimes against the Abkhazians (Marshania 1995)^[10]. Marshania’s output was certainly courageous. Yet, one has to bear in mind that, first, he was able to do that due to his high position and because he had rendered great service to Georgia. Furthermore, the Georgian authorities viewed him, albeit in vain, as a real competitor of Ardzinba in the coming presidential elections in Abkhazia (Globachev 1999: 27). Second, the book containing his article was published in Russian and apparently was propagandistic. Third, his particular approach proved to be alien to the other authors, who continued to advocate the Georgiocentric view. Indeed, the authors of the preface depicted an extremely romantic pattern of complete national harmony in Georgia through the centuries and blamed the “Gudauta separatists”, Caucasian highlanders and some “destructive and reactionary agents of Russia” for what happened. There was no question of any guilt on the Georgian side (Pipiia, Chikviladze 1995). Yet, the very publication of an article by an Abkhazian author in a Georgian book signified a shift in the Georgian intellectual environment. True, these changes were by no means radical. Georgian authors were still loyal to their view of the past as the only true one, and treated the different Abkhazian approach as only “distortion of the past and appropriation of the Georgian history” (Totadze 1994: 22; Gamakharia, Gogia 1997: 32).

Recently, two Georgian historians published a thick volume whose title, "Abkhazia – an historical region of Georgia", speaks for itself. The volume was edited by T. Sh. Mibchuanu who, as we know already, saw the Abkhazian Kingdom as populated by Svans alone and accused Voronov of distorting their early history. Mibchuanu was already an Academician of the National Academy of Georgia in the late 1990s. In this volume, the Abkhazian nationalists were represented as puppets of Russia, and historiography was called their main ideological weapon. "History, the Apswa historiography, which emerged during the Soviet era at the basis of Russian chauvinist social-political journalism of the 19th – 20th centuries, was hired to serve imperialistic interests" (Gamakharia, Gogia 1997: 9). Although the authors made every effort to distance themselves from the Soviet past, their writing style was very close to that of Soviet strugglers against the "fantasies of bourgeois historiography". They were ardent advocates of the view that all the territory of Abkhazia and even the lands that stretched further down to the Kuban' River in the northwest constituted a genuine Georgian territory, where Georgians had lived from time immemorial. They believed that, from the 11th century, the "Apswa tribes" began to infiltrate this region and "had occupied" the seashore up to the Inguri River by the 16th – 17th centuries. They also believed that the "Apswas" appropriated the Georgian name of the "Abkhazians" and that, before Abkhazia joined Russia, it was always a part of the Imereti Kingdom and, in ecclesiastical terms, was ruled by the west Georgian eparchy. They said that Russia used Abkhazia and the Abkhazians in order to exterminate the Caucasian highlanders, and so on (Gamakharia, Gogia 1997: 10-12)¹⁰².

The authors found it productive to link the ideas and scholarly approaches of these or other scholars directly with the facts of their personal lives. For example, Marr had taken an "anti-Georgian" stance after he was dropped from his position at the Department of the Georgian language of St. Petersburg University. They attributed his interest in the Abkhazian language to his "anti-Georgian attitude". They said the English scholar, George Hewitt, supported the Abkhazians because he was married to an Abkhazian woman. The major Georgian scholars discovered an early Abkhazian-Adyghe sub-stratum in the east Black Sea region because this met the demands of the "Marrist period". Everything that contradicted their own views the authors repudiated as theories that had been built to meet political demands. For example, Melikishvili's idea of the identity between the Kashka and Abeshla of Asia Minor and the Abkhazian-Adyghe ancestors was treated in like fashion (Gamakharia, Gogia 1997: 16-18, 24, 27-28, 129, note 10, 144, note 112).

The authors viewed all the Abkhazian and Russian concepts of the history of Georgia indiscriminately and a priori as entirely ethnocentric and highly anti-Georgian. At the same time, when they were interested in the opposite view, they gave up their own methodological approach. For example, they condemned the leading Georgian scholars (Dzhavakhishvili, Dzhanashia, and Chitaia) for their attachment to the migrationist concept, and shared the approach of the Russian archaeologist Kuftin, who emphasized the indigenous Caucasian roots of the

Georgian culture. The authors gave up the Iberian-Caucasian hypothesis. Instead, they shared Ingoroqva's argument in favor of the integration of the Abkhazians into the Georgian whole. This view identified the Abkhazian ancestors with west Georgian tribes who had shifted to "Adyghe speech" fairly recently (Gamakharia, Gogia 1997: 18-20).

While referring to archaeology, although in an amateur way, the authors identified the builders of the Colchis culture with the Georgians alone, extended its area to an implausible size (including eastern Georgia and southeast Turkey!), and "discovered" the Svan ancestors among the builders of the early dolmens (Gamakharia, Gogia 1997: 15. It is worth remembering that Svan-born Mibchuan was an editor of the volume!). While maintaining that the medieval authors did not distinguish between the Abkhazians and the Kartvelians and used the same term, "Abkhazians", for all of them, Gamakharia and Gogia failed to mention the well-known fact that the King's title always included references to various historical regions named after their inhabitants – "King of the Abkhazians, Kartes, Eris, Kakhis..." (Gamakharia, Gogia 1997: 37). Is not this evidence that the kings of medieval Georgia made distinctions among the various regional groups?

The authors by no means demonstrated their less-than-professional stance through their approaches to archaeological and philological data alone. A set of historical documents that made up half of their thick volume was published improperly as well. It lacked any previous historical analysis or any scholarly comments. Only documents were selected and published that met the demands of Georgian historiography. For example, the authors referred to the Russian Major, A. Diachkov-Tarasov, who related that the Abkhazians had once forced the Mingrelians southwards across the Inguri River. Yet, whereas the Major was referring to what had happened in the late 17th century, when the Abkhazian principality annexed some former Mingrelian lands, the authors represented the matter as though the Abkhazian highlanders had just begun their settlement throughout Abkhazia, occupied by Mingrelians alone, at an earlier time (Gamakharia, Gogia 1997: 44-45). Moreover, if historical evidence contradicted the Georgian view of the past, the authors accused them of a tendentious approach or poor knowledge of the real situation. Thus, the publication of the volume was obviously aimed at propagandizing the Georgian approach to history.

Naturally, the authors denied the Abkhazians' indigenous origins in Abkhazia and depicted them as recent newcomers from the northern Caucasus. Yet, the image of "newcomers" did not seem sufficient for the authors, and they represented the early "Apswas" as "Scythian aggressors" who exhausted Georgia by their bloody raids. While identifying the early Dzhiki, Abasgoi and Apsilae as Georgian tribes, the authors argued that the "Scythian aggressors" appropriated their names and conquered their lands in the 14th – 16th centuries. The "Apswas" were represented as the most bloodthirsty highlanders ever to invade Georgia. It was also said that they were doing their best to partition Georgia (Gamakharia, Gogia 1997: 26-32, 41).

It is easy to see that, while presenting the medieval history of Georgia, the authors reproduced all Ingoroqva's main arguments and emphasized that the medieval Abkhazians were ethnic Georgians. This volume clearly demonstrates the message of Ingoroqva's concept to contemporary Georgian politicians. Indeed, providing this concept is true, the mass Georgian peasant colonization of Abkhazia from the end of the 19th century might be viewed as the "return of the Georgian population that had been forced out of Abkhazia by the Apswa invaders in the 17th – 18th centuries" rather than as a "Georgian occupation" (Gamakharia, Gogia 1997: 58).

Unfortunately, as is emphasized by the Abkhazian historian, Ingoroqva's concepts had successfully conquered both Georgian academic minds and educational places in the 1990s. For example, it made up the core of a collection of essays entitled "Researches in the history of Abkhazia/Georgia" published in Tbilisi in 1999. It seems that many historians of post-Soviet Georgia openly share Ingoroqva's approach (Lakoba 2000: 18, 2001a, 2001b).

All of this made the Abkhazians angry, while depriving them of a homeland, history, identity and, not least, political rights (for example, see Vozba 1989a; 1989b; Kokoskeria 1989; Taria 1989; Tsvinaria 1989; Inal-Ipa 1989b, 1992: 3-28; Ashkharua 1993; Otyrba 1994: 282; Marykhuba 1994b: 34, 40-53). An author of the first propaganda booklet, published just after the Georgian invasion of Abkhazia, depicted the recent past in the following way. "The facts, events, the whole layers of life of the classical and medieval Abkhazian ancestors were affected by juggling, polishing, or even open falsification, Georgianization" (Marykhuba 1993: 3). Indeed, it seemed indubitable to Abkhazian authors that the Abkhazian-Adyge ancestors lived in northeast Asia Minor and southwest Transcaucasia at least from the 4th – 3rd Millennia B.C. Much later, this homogeneous region was divided by the arrival of the Kartvelians, who pushed the Abkhazians-Adyghes to western Transcaucasia (Lakoba, Shamba 1989; Lakoba 1990a: 4-6, 2000: 16-17; Belaia kniga 1993: 19-21; Marykhuba 1993: 8-10; Marykhuba 1994b: 34-35; Otyrba 1994: 282). The Abkhazians are especially proud of their early genetic links with the Hatti, Kashkai and Abeshla of Asia Minor and emphasize that those tribes enjoyed their own state, one of the earliest in the world, and strongly influenced the Indo-European Hittites (Chirikba 1998: 38-40, 42-43)¹⁰³. The Abkhazians consider it unquestionable that they had been an integrated people in the territory of Abkhazia in medieval times rather than being recent newcomers there. Among other authors, this approach is shared by the historian Stanislav Lakoba and the archaeologist Sergei Shamba, both of whom were active in the building up of new Abkhazia. Lakoba was the vice-speaker of the Parliament of the Republic of Abkhazia, and Shamba was first the Chairman of the People's Forum of Abkhazia "Aidgylara" and then the Minister of Foreign Affairs in the Abkhazian government.

This view is shared by the present president of Abkhazia, Vladislav Ardzinba, a professional historian and a specialist in the history of the early Near East who frequently refers to early history in his public speeches (Biguaa 1993). The

Abkhazian version of events (arguably with more historical support) links the Apsilae and the Abasgoi directly to the ancient Abkhazian-Adyghe groups. The Apsilae are associated with the Abkhazian's name for themselves, "Apsua", and the Abasgoi with the Abazinian self-designation, "Abaza". The Sanigai and the Misimianoi are treated as related populations rather than as Kartvelians (Inal-Ipa 1989b; Gunba 1989b: 140-150; Shamba 1989; Lakoba 1990a: 5; Kvarchia, Achugba 1991: 142; Marykhuba 1993: 11-14; Chirikba 1998: 44-47; Shamba 1998: 51, 58; Bgazhba 1998: 59). These tribes supposedly ruled the Black Sea littoral as far as the modern city of Sukhum and even further to the south, where they contacted the Mingrelians. In other words, it is argued that the Abkhazians already occupied all their modern territory by the 1st Millennium A.D. They were therefore the true local inhabitants rather than newcomers, with roots going back at least one and a half or two thousand years and possibly even longer (see especially Gunba 1989a: 139 ff., 1989b). Abkhazian archaeologists assume that the Abkhazians occupied the littoral through many thousands of years and it was they who left the Bronze and Early Iron Age sites, as well as the numerous tribal names mentioned by the classical authors (Shamba 1998: 51-56). It is worth noting that contemporary Abkhazian authors do not mention the Colchis Kingdom at all.

As concerns the Abkhazian Kingdom, Abkhazian authors may agree that the great majority of its population was made up of Kartvelians (Georgians) and that it was therefore at this time that Georgian gradually turned into the language of literacy and culture¹⁰⁴). They may also agree that the term "Abkhazian" was used in a broad sense at that time, and began to be applied to all the Kingdom's population in western Georgia. Nevertheless, the population was still multi-ethnic in composition. Moreover, the popularity of the Georgian language amongst the aristocracy, including its Abkhazian element, by no means prevented the commoners from speaking their native Abkhazian language. Indeed, as is well known, the Georgian nobility spoke foreign languages in the late classical time, which did not prevent Georgian commoners from speaking the Georgian language (Apakidze 1968: 278; Braund 1994: 215-216). Moreover, Abkhazian authors argue that it was precisely the establishment of the Abkhazian Kingdom that caused the consolidation of the Abkhazian tribes into a cohesive community. It then played the leading role in the life of the Kingdom. From their point of view, it is of great importance that the unifier of Abkhazia and the founder of the ruling dynasty, Leon II, declared himself to be "King of the Abkhazians" and is referred to in historic sources as "the Abkhazian ruling prince". All these facts are considered in the Abkhazian view to prove that the first true state in the territory of modern Georgia was founded by the Abkhazians (Gunba 1989a: 213-235; Lakoba, Shamba 1989; Lakoba 1990a: 4; Marykhuba 1993: 19-20; Chirikba 1998: 47; Bgazhba 1998: 61-63)¹⁰⁵). None of this downplays the Georgian contribution to cultural development in Abkhazia, which was recognized by the publication of a photograph of the well-known Besleti Bridge with an old Georgian inscription from the 11th – 12th centuries in the newspaper, "Sovietskaia Abkhazia" (October 11, 1989. P. 4).

After Abkhazia had declared independence and open armed conflict with Georgia had taken place, the Abkhazian view of the past came to be more independent and more radical. It seems as though the authors of contemporary Abkhazian propaganda were attempting to base their statements on the aforementioned Ashkhatsava's concept of history. The latter's ideas were echoed in a booklet entitled "Of the Abkhazians and Abkhazia", written by the Chairman of the People's Party of Abkhazia, I. Marykhuba (Markholia), and published twice – first in September 1992, and then in February 1993, i.e. at the time of the Abkhazian-Georgian war. Apparently, the booklet was considered very important at that time. It was intended to encourage the Abkhazians and stir up their patriotism with the help of references to their great past. Its author, who had participated for a long time in the Abkhazian nationalist movement, depicted Abkhazia as the "Promised Land" where the first humans came into being. He represented the Abkhazians as the earliest people of the west Caucasus, who enjoyed one of the earliest languages in the world and who were descendants of the classical Colchians. In his booklet, he assumed that the Abkhazians already had their own writing system in early medieval times. Like Ashkhatsava, he maintained that the Georgian alphabet was invented based on the earlier Abkhazian one. He emphasized with pride that the Abkhazian state had developed without any breaks (sic! V. Sh.) over the last twelve centuries.

In contrast, the Georgians were represented as the newcomers in the Caucasus, who settled on former Abkhazian-Adyghe lands. The author argued that the Abkhazian people (*narodnost'*) had come into being several centuries earlier than the Georgians, and that the Abkhazian language had affected Georgian, rather than vice-versa. The united Georgian Kingdom was presented as being derivative of the Abkhazian one, and the honor of the title of the "King of the Abkhazians" was pointed out. In other words, the Georgians were granted the image of "younger brothers" who owed the elder brothers for all their virtues. Moreover, following Ashkhatsava, the author accused the great medieval Georgian historian, Vakhushti Bagrationi, of the falsification of history and encroachments upon the glorious Abkhazian past.

"Georgian apartheid" was called the main enemy of the Abkhazian people. The author insisted that continuous genocide of the latter be carried out over the last hundred years. Feeling free of former censorship restrictions, the author accused Georgian historiography of serving anti-Abkhazian political goals. All the main Georgian historical ideas were condemned, namely "Iberian-Caucasian studies", Melikishvili's theory of Georgian feudalism, Dzhanashia's views of Georgian medieval culture, Ingoroqva's and M. Lordkipanidze's picture of the recent Abkhazian arrival in Abkhazia, and the concept of "dual aboriginality" (Marykhuba 1993. Also see Marykhuba 1994b: 40-53)¹⁰⁶.

The war of 1992-1993, stirred up a lot of anti-Georgian feeling among the Abkhazians, which was manifested by their stated perception of history. Nowadays, the proclamation of Bagrat III, the King of the united Georgian Kingdom is treated

by the Abkhazians as a “national-political mistake” made by their ancestors (Istoriia Abkhazii 1991: 59; Nasha sila 1993: 29; Smyr 1994: 8; Chitasheva 1995) which has to be avoided in future. Some Abkhazian authors have an even more radical concept that has it that the “Abkhazian Kingdom was mostly the state of the Abkhazian people, even though it embraced other groups, including the Georgians” (Kvarchia, Achugba 1991: 143). At any case, the state that is called the “united Georgian Kingdom” by Georgian historiography is called “Abkhazian-Georgian”, or “Abkhazian-Imeretian”, by Abkhazian authors. It is this concept that encourages the Abkhazians in their struggle for sovereignty. It is no accident that President Ardzinba refers in his speeches to the ancient Abkhazian state as having been founded “more than 1,200 years ago” (Nasha sila 1993: 10; Biguaa 1993).

The confrontation with Georgia sometimes resulted in the building of quite extravagant historical constructions in Abkhazia. Thus, certain intellectuals view it as a local expression of the global struggle against world evil. The latter includes multinational states with their “imperialistic pride” that is based on the teachings of some “Cainite priests”, the bearers of negative power. The authors of this construction associate these priests with the proto-Chan tribes. Thus the Georgians have become the everlasting bearers of destructive energy aimed at the proto-Abkhazians-Yaphetids, who are the bearers of the principle of Good. The Evil agent expresses itself in “messianic dreams”, namely ungrounded Georgian claims and their attempt to build up a “small empire” as early as in the period of the Georgian Bagratids. The authors maintain that this is what caused the collapse of the Abkhazian-Imeretian Kingdom (Regel’son, Khvartskii 1997: 480, 502-503, 536-537, 547-548).

A more moderate Abkhazian approach to the historical process was manifested by the textbook, “History of Abkhazia”, that was completed by a team of Abkhazian scholars in the 1990s. This book had a dramatic fate. It came out in 1992 and was intended for the new school year. However, the Georgian-Abkhazian war broke out, and the great bulk of the printed copies were destroyed by the Georgian military in Sukhum. Nonetheless, Abkhazian authorities found it possible to republish the book in Gudauta in 1993. One can imagine how difficult it was for them to carry out this project. Yet, the new publication of the “History of Abkhazia” demonstrates the great importance of the past to both Abkhazian authorities and intellectuals. Indeed, the Abkhazian view of history was to shape the Abkhazian nation.

Note that the President of Abkhazia, Ardzinba, a professional historian himself, took part in this project. In collaboration with V. A. Chirikba, he wrote the “Introduction”, focused on the Abkhazian people’s origins (Lakoba 1993: 5-12). In this chapter, the Abkhazians were represented as the earliest indigenous population in all the territory of Abkhazia, as well as in certain Russian territories adjacent to the city of Sochi. The Abkhazian language was called one of the earliest languages in the world, a member of the Abkhazian-Adyghe family of languages, which itself constitutes part of the North-Caucasian linguistic stock. In contrast, the Iberian-Caucasian hypothesis was given up as obsolete. The close relationships between the

Abkhazian-Adyghe languages and the dead Hatti language of Asia Minor were emphasized. The authors did not fail to remark that the Hatti strongly influenced the Indo-European Hittites. The Hatti were also mentioned as the inventors of iron metallurgy. Following contemporary linguists, the authors demonstrated that the bearers of the North Caucasian languages occupied a huge territory in the remote past, embracing not only the Caucasus but also large areas of the Near East and Asia Minor. They built the Hurrian and the Urartian states, and left their traces in the place names of the southeast Black Sea region.

It is worth noting that all of this accords well with the views of contemporary historical linguists. Indeed, the Abkhazians-Adyghe are the descendants of the earliest inhabitants of the east and southeast Black Sea regions. Yet, the authors of the "Introduction" went even further. They referred to the well known, albeit not well confirmed, hypothesis that derived the Abkhazians and the Adyghe from the Abeshla and Kashkai of early Asia Minor. Moreover, they represented the tribal alliance of the Abeshla and Kashkai as a strong power that the Hittites could not help but respect. The authors went so far as to find the "mighty state of Kaska" in the Upper Halys River Valley (Lakoba 1993: 10. Also see Lakoba 2000: 16-17). True, the authors were aware that, while deriving the Abkhazians from the Abeshla, they had to base their theory on the migrationist approach, and the Abkhazians would thus lose their absolute indigenous status. That was why they went back to the idea of the extensive Abkhazian-Adyghe settlement all along the Black Sea littoral, but did not fail to secure the glory of the mighty Abeshla and Kashkai for this entity.

In their quest for their glorious ancestors, they went even further, and recalled Turchaninov's "discovery" (though omitting his name). They pointed to an early writing tradition in the east Black Sea region that was related to the Byblos, Phoenician and Hittite writing systems (Lakoba 1993: 11). Referring to the archaeological data, the authors emphasized the continuity of cultural development in Abkhazia from as early as the dolmen period. All of this was also thought to demonstrate the long history of the Abkhazians, legitimize their indigenous status and relate them to the higher civilizations of the early Near East.

Needless to say, all the tribes of the east Black Sea region (the Heniokhoi, Achaeans, Apsilae, Abasgoi, Sanigai and Misimianoi) mentioned by the classical authors, are indiscriminately identified with the early Abkhazian tribes. In a similar way, the principalities of Apsilia, Abasgia, Misiminia and Sanigia are represented as the basis on which first the Abkhazian principality and then the Abkhazian Kingdom were formed. Naturally, all of this was connected with the political activity of the early Abkhazians. The name "Abkhazian" was derived from the early tribal name of "Abasgoi".

At the same time, neither Colchians nor the Colchian Kingdom were ever mentioned in the "Introduction", apparently to avoid arguments with the Georgians. Instead, they mentioned the numerous resettlements of particular Abkhazian tribes to the northeast, across the Great Caucasian ridge. Yet, there was no question of any

reverse movements of the highlanders, which attracted Georgian scholars so much.

All of these issues were discussed in other chapters of the textbook in more detail. All the chapters focused on the earlier past of Abkhazia, from the Stone Age up to the end of the Middle Ages, i.e. a third of the book, were written by Yuri N. Voronov in minor collaboration with his Abkhazian colleagues (O. Kh. Bgazhba wrote on early metallurgy and R. N. Katsia on folk culture and Islam). It is worth noting that, being a professional archaeologist, he was more cautious than the authors of the "Introduction" were. He avoided discussing the issue of the dolmen builders' ethnic origin and did not insist on cultural continuity between them and later local residents (Lakoba 1993: 28-29). Yet, his co-author, O. Kh. Bgazhba, expressed his pride that the Abkhazian-Adyghe ancestors invented iron metallurgy in Asia Minor. In contrast with the Georgians, he identified the Chalybes with the Hittites and represented the Kashkai and Abeshla as their successors in metallurgical craft (Lakoba 1993: 31)¹⁰⁷.

While discussing the classical period, Voronov got into ethnic issues as well. He identified the Heniokhoi with the Abkhazian ancestors, and viewed them as the builders of the "Colchis-Koban" cultural province" (Lakoba 1993: 33). At the same time, he did not mention the Colchians at all, and treated the Colchis Kingdom as a chimera, which had no good scholarly grounds (Lakoba 1993: 36). Instead, while referring to cultural continuity, he found the culture of the Abkhazian ancestors in the 6th – 4th centuries B.C., although, as we know, the term "Abasgoi" was first mentioned in the 2nd century A.D. (Lakoba 1993: 37). Moreover, he demonstrated close interactions between the early Greek and local cultures and called the Abkhazians the direct "successors of the classical culture" (Lakoba 1993: 45)¹⁰⁸.

Being the director of the archaeological project in Tsebel'da, Voronov was able to come to a conclusion that was in sharp contradiction with orthodox Georgian historiography. He had not found any significant cultural changes in the Tsebel'da Valley at the turn of the 1st Millennium A.D., and, on these grounds he rejected the hypothesis of mass migrations by the highlanders or any crucial ethnic transformations in the territory of Abkhazia in the first centuries A.D. He was convinced that the tribes that were well known to the classical authors were still continuing to live there, and he considered it possible to identify them with the Abkhazian ancestors (Lakoba 1993: 46-52).

As we know, while analyzing the early medieval period, Georgian authors emphasized the Laz Kingdom. In contrast, Voronov most stressed Apsilia and Abasgia, and mentioned Lazica only in passing. In his representation, it did not play any role in the political and cultural development of the Abkhazian tribes. It was even unclear in his chapter who in particular lived in Lazica. Voronov did his best to avoid discussing the problem of the Mingrelians-Laz. He only mentioned them twice, and not in connection with Lazica (Lakoba 1993: 61, 66).

Voronov was very cautious while discussing the baptism of the Abkhazians. In this matter, the archaeologist won a victory over the ideologist. He rejected all hypotheses of the early arrival of Christianity to Abkhazia, and pointed to the

legendary nature of evidence of St. Andrew's activities. With reference to his archaeological data from Tsebel'da, he demonstrated that even after the official baptism, the bulk of the Apsilae still observed their pagan rituals. In fact, it took about a hundred years (from the mid-6th to the early 7th centuries) to baptize them entirely (Lakoba 1993: 66).

Voronov's view of the emergence of a state in Abkhazia also differed radically from those developed by Georgian historiography. He believed that the Abkhazian elite was shaped within the Byzantine political tradition and had nothing to do with early medieval Georgian political formations. Even less was it connected to the Kartli kings, who had no sovereignty over Abkhazia (Lakoba 1993: 68, 71).

Voronov was less original in his approach to the causes and environment of the Abkhazian Kingdom's emergence. Yet, even here he dared to challenge Georgian historiography. First, he pointed out that the original name, "Abkhazian Kingdom", was used by Georgian sources only, i.e. the Georgians of those days in contrast to our contemporaries acknowledged the priority of Abkhazia. Second, before the 10th century, the Byzantines treated Abkhazia as their vassal, and, indeed, for important reasons, Abkhazia of the 9th – 10th centuries was closely connected with Byzantium rather than with Georgia. In this environment, there was no question of any "pro-Georgian" policy by the Abkhazian kings. Instead, the competition between separate rulers was characterized by each one's striving to enlarge his territories at the expense of his neighbors (Lakoba 1993: 73-77). In Voronov's view, it also made no sense to oppose some early settled civilized inhabitants of Abkhazia to any recent newcomers from the highlands as was done by Georgian historians. In fact, the great bulk of the free commoners of Abkhazia were engaged in transhumance pastoralism and did not differ much from the highlanders in their life-style (Lakoba 1993: 74, 86-87).

Concerning the architecture of the Abkhazian Kingdom, Voronov pointed out that its closest links were with the Byzantine tradition and wrote of the "Abkhazian-Alan school of the east Byzantine Church architecture". He found no particular Georgian features there. With reference to the earlier use of Greek in liturgy and literature, he emphasized that the Georgian influence failed to express itself until as late as the very end of the 10th century (Lakoba 1993: 87-89, 142). What Georgian authors used to call the "united Georgian Kingdom", Voronov defined as the "Kingdom of the Abkhazians and the Kartvelians", or, otherwise, the Bagratid Kingdom, after the ruling Dynasty. In his view, this was closer to historical reality. Indeed, first of all, the name "Georgia" came into being only in the 15th century, and second, that was how he appreciated the great importance of Abkhazian participation in the political process (Lakoba 1993: 90, 99).

The events of the 17th century were interpreted as internecine strife between the Mingrelian and the Abkhazian Princes, who struggled for territories and power within the region. There was no question of any mass migrations of the North Caucasian highlanders to Abkhazia, although it was recognized that the Abkhazian rulers recruited the Dzhzygets, Kabardinians and Abazins from the northwest

Caucasus (Lakoba 1993: 122-126). It is worth mentioning that Voronov agreed with Georgian authors in that the so-called "Great Abkhazian (Kelasuri) wall" was built by the Mingrelian Prince Levan Dadiani against Abkhazian raids. In contrast, certain Abkhazian historians did their best to push its construction much further into the past and to isolate it from Mingrelian activity. They did this simply because, for the Georgians, it served as crucial evidence that southern Abkhazia (Samurzaqano) was always populated by Mingrelians (Lakoba 1993: 123-124). According to the orthodox Abkhazian view, Abkhazian expansion southwards as far as the Inguri River was presented in the textbook as a return to their traditional lands, which had been occupied by the Georgians for a while (Lakoba 1993: 126).

Another textbook on the history of Abkhazia, recently published in Maikop, is of no less interest. After the Abkhazian-Georgian war, Maikop, the capital of the Republic of Adygheia, became an important center for the Abkhazian intellectuals who found refuge there. The textbook was written by a Russian writer under Abkhazian control, and the Abkhazians reviewed and edited it. Furthermore, it was apparently affected by the Gudauta textbook analyzed above. The structure of the Maikop textbook is worth considering. Half the volume (57 of 122 pages) focuses on the prehistoric, classical and early medieval past, up to the 8th century A.D. That is, the Golden Age of the Abkhazian past is heavily emphasized. From the very beginning, the reader is fascinated with the deep and rich Abkhazian prehistory. He or she becomes familiar with both the Sino-Caucasian and North Caucasian families of languages that penetrate the past as deeply as 10-11 thousand years, and realizes that the Abkhazian language was an important participant in this linguistic development. Thus it is displayed as a "unique relic" worth protecting.

While narrating early history, the textbook establishes a direct link between the Kashkai and Abeshla of Asia Minor, on the one hand, and the late classical Abasgoi and Apsilae, who are called Abkhazian ancestors. The Sanigai and Misimianoi are viewed as proto-Abkhazian tribes. Objections are made to their having any relationship with the Svans (Yagovitin 1995: 5, 23, 41-42, 49). At the same time, the Colchians are missing, and the Colchis Kingdom is treated as an historical myth. Instead, the early Greek colonies are appreciated as having brought civilization to the east Black Sea region. The adjacent provincial archaeological culture is identified with the Abkhazian ancestors. An analysis of the classical past ends with the conclusion that the "Greeks and the Abkhazians became relatives in both blood and culture". The Abkhazians are declared to be the direct successors of the classical culture (Yagovitin 1995: 36).

Archaeological data play a significant role in the textbook. The rich warrior burials near Sukhum, dated to the 4th century B.C., are associated with the Abkhazian nobility. The Tsebel'da region is viewed as the most important center of the late classical and early medieval Apsilae who, according to archaeological evidence, underwent the formation of a complex society at that time. The long cultural continuity of that region is interpreted in favor of the idea of population continuity, and the author denies any highlanders' migrations in the first centuries

A.D. The Christian churches in Tsebel'da are identified with invaluable Abkhazian relics because it is there that the baptism of the Abkhazians commenced (Yagovitin 1995: 37-42, 47, 50). In fact, archaeological excavations in Tsebel'da shed new light on rare early medieval evidence. Iranian armor of the 6th century A.D. was found which confirmed the early medieval Persian claims to the East Black Sea region. Bricks with stamp prints of the bishop Constantine, who had baptized the Apsilae in the 530s, were discovered. Changes in burial rites permitted scholars to trace the movement of former pagans to Christianity during the 6th – early 7th centuries. The author also pointed out that the earliest Christian domed church in the former USSR territory was found in Dranda in Abkhazia (Yagovitin 1995: 47, 50). In brief, Christian antiquities in Abkhazia are especially emphasized in the textbook that, as we shall see further on, is of great importance to contemporary Abkhazians and is closely connected with the current political environment.

The lead stamps from the 7th – 8th centuries, found in Pityus, are interpreted as evidence of complex socio-political and religious organization, where the Abkhazian noble people played a significant role. They were granted Byzantine titles and served Byzantine interests, and it is with their names that the well-known list of medieval Abkhazian rulers (“Divan of the Abkhazian Kings”) began (Yagovitin 1995: 52-53). The textbook narrates the growth of power and prestige of the Abkhazian ruler Leon I, who took advantage of the favorable political situation and, while being the ruler of Abasgia, managed to peacefully appropriate the territories of Apsilia, Misiminia and Lazica in the mid-8th century. His success was extended by his nephew, Leon II, who being supported by the free commoners, united western Georgia and established the Abkhazian Kingdom. It is obvious that the author owed much to Dzhanashia’s approach. He disagrees with him in only one but very sensitive point for the Abkhazians. He refuses to see any “Georgian policy” in Leon’s actions, and, following Voronov, depicts him as a typical feudal despot who was led by his own interests, although in the long range his policy resulted in the unification of all the Kartvelians (Georgians) within one and the same state (Yagovitin 1995: 55-63).

This state is portrayed as multi-ethnic. The Greeks, Armenians, Jews, Zyghoi (Adyghe), and Alans lived there side by side with the Abkhazians and Georgians. Yet, the Abkhazians always played an important role there, which was demonstrated by the fact that the nickname of Queen Tamar’s son, derived from the Apsars’, i.e. the Abkhazian, language. All these sorts of facts are interpreted in the textbook in favor of seeing the Abkhazians enjoying a distinct body – “their own language, political autonomy and leaders”. The author goes so far as to talk of some distinct administrative unit, which was formed in Abkhazia in the 12th century (Yagovitin 1995: 82-85). This was how a historical basis for the contemporary independence of Abkhazia was being developed.

The eastern direction of the Abkhazian kings’ expansionist policy is explained with reference to the geopolitical environment of those days. Indeed, the Abkhazian neighbors in the north (the Khazar Khanate) and in the south (the Byzantine

Empire) had mighty states, and one had best avoid conflicts with them. In contrast, the Abkhazian move to the southeast was encouraged by Byzantium, which viewed that expansion as being aimed against its Muslim enemies. The textbook intentionally distances itself from the anti-Byzantine attitude of Soviet historiography and emphasizes friendly relationships between Abkhazia and the Byzantium. Rather, the author does his best to disprove the Georgian idea of the early subordination of the Abkhazian Church to the Mtskheta catholicos (Yagovitin 1995: 66-68).

The author advantageously uses archaeological data in order to demonstrate cultural growth in the territory of historical Abkhazia in the 8th – 10th centuries. He tells of flourishing trade and crafts, very active seaports, and extensive church construction. In contrast with Georgian historiography, the buildings are defined, following Voronov, as of the “Abkhazian-Alan school of the east Byzantine tradition”. The important role of Byzantium is demonstrated by the predominance of Greek both in bureaucracy and liturgy. Georgian inscriptions appeared in Abkhazia only from the very end of the 10th century (Yagovitin 1995: 71-72). To put it differently, Abkhazia was closely connected to Byzantium until the very late 10th century. There was nothing Georgian there at that time.

The initiative on the unification of Georgia is also ascribed to the Abkhazians. They, rather than the Tao-Klargeti ruler, enthroned Bagrat III. The point is made that, after that time, the name of the state was the “Kingdom of the Abkhazians and the Kartvelians”, and this turned into the “united Georgian Kingdom” only in the 19th – 20th centuries, due to Georgian historiography. The author argues that the crucial historical symbols of the Abkhazian identity of the Kingdom were, first, the primary place of “King of the Abkhazians” in the Georgian Kings’ title, and second, the fact that Bagrat III chose to be buried in the Bedi Church in Abkhazia, rather than in the Mtskheta Christian center. Having said all of that, the author comes to the following conclusion. “If Abasgia and Apsilia had not developed in the 6th – 8th centuries within the Byzantine cultural-political system, if there had not been a politically independent, albeit Christian... Byzantinized, Abkhazian Kingdom in the 8th – 10th centuries, the cultural-historical unity called an “all-Georgian” one nowadays, which gravitates to the same Christian world, would not have been shaped in the 11th – 13th centuries” (Yagovitin 1995: 75). At the same time, in order to satisfy both the Abkhazian Christians and Muslims and to emphasize the deep roots of Abkhazian religious tolerance, the author reminds the reader that Bagrat III’s coins bore the Arabic inscription “Muhammad – the messenger of Allah” on one side, and the Georgian inscription “Christ, extol Bagrat, King of the Abkhazians” on the other (Yagovitin 1995: 76).

In order to secure a reasonable balance, the author of the textbook does not sacrifice the Georgian contribution to cultural development in medieval Abkhazia. He mentions that the Abkhazian nobility was fluent in Georgian, that the local Church was ultimately Georgianized, and that Abkhazia enjoyed great works of Georgian architecture (Yagovitin 1995: 87-88). Yet, he remarked that the

commoners kept speaking Abkhazian and still observed their pagan rituals. The latter was confirmed by archaeologists, despite the lack of historical evidence.

The hot problems of the 17th century are represented in the following way. That period was characterized by a permanent state of war between the Abkhazians and the Mingrelians. The Abkhazians enjoyed strong support from the north Caucasian Sadzes, Abazins and Kabardinians who arrived from across the mountain ridge. In those days certain Kabardinian Princes subordinated highland communities in Abkhazia, and the Abkhazians partly resettled to the southeast, in Samurzaqano. From that time, the Abkhazians and the Mingrelians were divided by the Inguri River (Yagovitin 1995: 104-109).

The textbook concludes with two main ideas. First, the Abkhazians were a distinct people with their own rich and complex history, and it is no accident that they "courageously defend their right to their own place on the Earth". Second, under Soviet power, their history was drastically distorted for the sake of so called "peoples' friendship". This, in practical terms, expressed itself by the appropriation of the past by the "chosen peoples" and also by the "construction of a mighty state [in the past] whose boundaries were made to coincide with those established after 1917, or seen as even more extensive" (Yagovitin 1995: 120-121). Georgian historiography is not referred to, but the thoughtful reader immediately realizes who is being indicated with these words.

Thus, both textbooks analyzed above inform the reader that the Abkhazians lived in Abkhazia from time immemorial and were closely connected with the early civilizations of Asia Minor. The great value of the Abkhazian language and the necessity of protecting it are emphasized. It is argued that a highly stratified society was shaped in Abkhazia in an evolutionary way, which resulted in the establishment of the Abkhazian Kingdom by the Abkhazians themselves, by both kings and commoners. It is also argued that, in their policies, the Abkhazian Kings were led by their own selfish interests and the given political environment rather than by any irrational "all-Georgian" interests, which were in fact lacking. The great contribution of the Abkhazians to building the Georgian state is acknowledged, and the Georgians have to appreciate that. At the same time, any Georgian participation in the formation of the Abkhazian political and cultural system is denied. Instead, the beneficial impact of the classical Greeks and Byzantium upon the Abkhazians is emphasized to the extent that the Greeks are in fact included in the list of Abkhazian ancestors. An early Christian tradition among the Abkhazians is especially appreciated, although Abkhazia is persistently depicted as a multicultural and multireligious country, which practiced tolerance. Finally, the continuity of the development of the distinct Abkhazian ethnic community and its political organization is demonstrated, which must establish an historical basis for Abkhazian aspirations to sovereignty. It is worth mentioning that many arguments are derived from archaeological rather than historical sources. Thus, the decisive role of archaeology in the construction of the past of formerly illiterate peoples is apparent.

There is no doubt that the textbooks, which exhumed and refreshed the memory of the remote past, succeeded in inflaming Abkhazian self-awareness, while providing it a basis in the deeper layers of the past and attracting them through their great ancestors' deeds. This was no less promoted by an article on Abkhazia in the academic handbook, "Peoples of the World" (1988), which called the Abkhazians a very early people, contemporaries of the early Near Eastern civilizations (for example, see Lakoba, Shamba 1989; Khobotoev 1989; Marykhuba 1993: 17).

Abkhazian self-awareness was also affected by the discoveries of Soviet historical linguists who formulated the theory of the North Caucasian linguistic community in the late 1980s, and made a successful attempt to relate it to the Sino-Tibetan languages, on the one hand, and the North American Na-Dene languages, on the other. Fascinated by these tremendous perspectives, the Abkhazian historian, S. Lakoba, reasoned in his popular book that Abkhazian might be the future language of all humanity. While doing this, he referred to certain Russian writers of early in this century, who used this sort of hyperbole in order to show respect to Abkhazian hospitality. In that book, Lakoba emphasized specific features of Abkhazian development in early medieval times, namely, the great number of free commoners who helped the Abkhazian Kingdom rise above its neighbors. At the same time, he pointed to the drastic ethno-demographic changes in Abkhazia in the late 19th century, after which the Abkhazians turned into an ethnic minority in their own land (Lakoba 1988: 5-14, 22, 28)¹⁰⁹). Thus, recent history could not but provoke negative emotions among the Abkhazians. Rather, the great distant past stirred up the Abkhazian imagination and allowed them to look forward with optimism. At the same time, the Georgians were irritated with all this Abkhazian ethnocentric reasoning (Totadze 1994: 30-32, 1995: 41-44; Gamakharia, Gogia 1997: 17).

The Abkhazians were not satisfied with scholarly arguments alone. Alarmed by the hostile propaganda disseminated by the Georgian media, in May 1989 the Abkhazians addressed the Oracle who, they believed, lived in the mountain of Achandara in the Gudauta region. They asked the Oracle to clarify when Abkhazian ancestors had settled in Abkhazia. According to my informants, the Oracle confirmed that the Abkhazians were an indigenous people, occupying their own lands (Shnirelman 1989a). This encouraged the Abkhazians and helped them to resist the Georgian invasion.

CHAPTER 10

HISTORY, RELIGION, DEMOGRAPHY, POLITICS

When the Abkhazians felt that their language, culture and identity were in a state of emergency, they appreciated any fact (or fiction!) that might confirm their indigenous status and long history in Abkhazia, or was evidence of Abkhazian-born people receiving international recognition. That is why the well-known Abkhazian writer, Alexei Gogua, alarmed by the contemporary conditions of the Abkhazian people, was so attracted by the Abkhazian identity of Ioann Petritsi (although the term “Abasgoi/Abkhazian” had an inclusive meaning at that time) and insisted on recognition of Turchaninov’s “discovery” (although it had been disproved by scholars) (Gogua 1989). At the same time, while accusing him of credulity and careless use of historical data, his opponent, the professional historian, M. Lordkipanidze, did not avoid serious errors herself. For example, she maintained that non-Georgian speech was recorded in western Georgia only from the 17th century. While doing this, she failed to mention the “Apsar” nickname of Queen Tamar’s son, which was evidence of the “Apsars”, i.e. Abkhazians, in the region by the end of the 12th century (Tsulaia 1991: 118; Hewitt 1996: 199). Further on, with reference to an article by the Academician Yu. Kocharava, in the newspaper “Akhalgazrda Komunisti” (June 6, 1989), she argued that the Abkhazians accounted for only 17.6 percent of the population of Abkhazia by 1921. At the same time, according to the national census of 1926, the number was 27.8 percent, and even a Georgian demographer recognized that (Totadze 1994: 13. Also see Muller 1998: 232). Actually, she referred to the smaller number in order to avoid discussing the hot issue of the decrease of the Abkhazian’s percentage in the overall population in the 1940s – 1950s. Indeed, M. Lordkipanidze attempted to deny there were mass Mingrelian resettlements in Abkhazia during that period. While remarking correctly that Gogua used too high a number for the Georgian migrants (200 thousand), she herself used much lower numbers than were correct. For example, she insisted that the Georgian population increased by 79 thousand people in Abkhazia between 1926 and 1959 (in fact, it was by almost 90 thousand! V. Sh.). While giving the number of Russian and Armenian migrants, she forgot (? V. Sh.) to mention Georgian ones (M. Lordkipanidze 1989. Cf. Totadze 1994: 13). M. Lordkipanidze disseminated all these ideas through Georgian newspapers and on TV at the turn of the 1990s (for that, see Kvarchia, Achugba 1991: 141).

In fact, in all her presentations during that time (M. Lordkipanidze 1989, 1990)

she reproduced the orthodox Georgian view of history, developed over the preceding decades. At the same time, as was demonstrated by Voronov, many of her key arguments could not survive thorough criticism. First, the hypothesis of the Colchis Kingdom especially as concerned its "Georgian" population, remained highly disputable and does not prove anything (Voronov 1989a. Also see Belaia kniga 1993: 27). As we have already seen, its active use by Georgian politicians is caused by reasons that are far from scholarly.

Second, nowadays there are many archaeological arguments in favor of the long cultural continuity of Tsebel'da from the 8th century B.C. until the 8th century A.D. This means that it is incorrect to consider the Apsilae together with the Abasgoi migrants who arrived only in the first centuries A.D. They were doubtless Abkhazian ancestors who lived there from very remote times. Third, over its first 150 years, the Abkhazian Kingdom was closely connected with Byzantium, and the extensive use of Greek was good evidence of that. There was no question of any "Georgian policy" of its rulers during that period. In his response to the Academician Beridze, Voronov remarked quite correctly that the early medieval Abkhazian rulers were driven by their own selfish interests rather than by any "all-Georgian" ones, and the notion of "Georgia", or "Georgian land" came into being much later (Voronov 1989c).

Fourth, during the period of the so called united Georgian state, the Abkhazians, on the one hand, were very active in its politics and enjoyed the respect of its rulers, and on the other hand, held onto their own identity. One had to acknowledge that Georgia inherited important Byzantine elements of its power structure through the Abkhazian Dynasty. Fifth, whereas there is good evidence of Abkhazian resettlement in the northern Caucasus in late medieval times, reliable evidence of any reverse movement is lacking. Finally, Christianity was introduced to Abkhazia in the 4th – 5th centuries A.D., and was controlled by the Constantinople patriarch for centuries. Greek not only dominated the liturgy until the late 10th century, but was used by the Church on equal terms with Georgian until as late as the 14th century¹¹⁰. Voronov also pointed out that all the early Christian churches in the territory of Abkhazia should be defined in the context of the east Byzantine tradition rather than ascribed to Georgian architecture (Voronov 1989a, 1989b). Voronov's views strongly affected contemporary Abkhazian historiography, although they were rejected by the Georgian counterparts.

In 1988-1989, the issue of Abkhazian religious identity had a high profile. At that time, many Georgian authors, following Ingoroqva's concept, identified the Christian population of medieval Abkhazia with the Georgians and linked the decline of Christianity there with the mass migration of the North Caucasian highlanders, who had adopted Islam very quickly. Simultaneously, the Georgian mass media cultivated an image of Christian Georgia surrounded by hostile Muslim peoples. They did this in order to find sympathy in the Christian countries of the West. An important role in this strategy was played by the image of the Abkhazians, who were represented as entirely Muslim and closely associated with Muslim

fundamentalists. Georgian TV disseminated rumors of close contacts between the Abkhazians and Turkey and Iran (although the Abkhazian Muslims were Sunnis! V. Sh.). After the Lykhny declaration was adopted by the Abkhazians in February 1989, which claimed the inclusion of the Abkhazian Republic into the Russian Federation, Tbilisi TV said that the Abkhazians were planning to establish a Muslim Caucasian republic (Shnirelman 1989a; Belaia kniga 1993: 15)¹¹¹). Georgian politicians were also alarmed by the Muslim factor (Nadareishvili 1996: 34).

Passions have become further inflamed since the events of July 15 – 16, 1989, in which Abkhazians of Turkish origin (a father, daughter and nephew) played an active part. They bravely resisted an armed Mingrelian group who attempted to cross the Ghalidzga River and reach the Abkhazian side. All my Abkhazian informants were grateful to these courageous people, who saved them from a massacre. Yet, to the Georgians, this was one more piece of evidence of the close contacts between the Abkhazians and Turkey. Rumors circulated that the First Secretary of the Gudauta Regional Cell of the CPG, K. K. Ozgan, received weapons from Turkey in order to arm the Abkhazians against the Georgians.

The tendency to treat all Abkhazians as Muslim fanatics became even stronger under President Zviad Gamsakhurdia. The historian, Marika Lordkipanidze, openly supported this when she represented all Abkhazians in western Georgia as true Muslims and bloody enemies of Christianity (M. Lordkipanidze 1990: 50). All of this once again reminded people of Ingoroqva's views, since he had once insisted that pagan nomads had forced the Christians out of Abkhazia in the 17th century. In exhuming this concept, M. Lordkipanidze was by no means alone. Certain other Georgian historians followed her in that (for example, see Gamakharia, Gogia 1997: 45-46). A propaganda booklet, published in Kutaisi in 1995, warned of the aspirations of the "Apswa separatists" to build up a "new Muslim state in the Caucasus at the expense of the territory of historical Georgia", in order to isolate Georgia from the Christian world (Chabukiani 1995: 2, 51).

This propaganda was rather effective. While in Sukhumi in the fall of 1989, I heard from many Georgians and Russians about preparations in the Muslim world for a decisive battle against Christianity. Significantly, by Muslims, people meant not only Azeris and Abkhazians but also Ossetians (who are mostly Christians). A Russian woman told me that, although the Abkhazians had neither mosques nor mullahs, they were Muslims by birth. All of this corresponded perfectly well with the image of a besieged fortress that was intensively forged by Georgian propaganda (Shnirelman 1989a).

In fact the religious situation in Abkhazia is more complicated (Clogg 1998; Lakoba 2000: 16). Sunni Islam predominates in the north (mainly, in the Gudauta region), and Orthodox Christianity predominates in the south (mainly, in the Ochamchira region). At the same time, the Abkhazian attitude towards both professions of faith is rather restrained. For example, Christians did not attend service for the chief reason, they said, that they were not competent in Georgian, which was the language of the liturgy (Smyr 1994: 19). Another explanation, which

I heard, was that the sinners going to hell depicted on the icon in the Gudauta church looked very much like Abkhazians, and the latter did not like that.

As concerns Islam, it was even less lucky in Abkhazia. In 1918, the Georgian Men'sheviks burned all the mosques, because they suspected that the Muslims were both disloyal and in contact with Turkey (Smyr 1994: 17). In the 1930s – 1950s, people were afraid of talking about Islam at all, since at that time Muslims were persecuted and Muslim peoples were being deported. It seems that all the Muslim customs in the Gudauta region were represented by only one – refusal to raise pigs. Local Abkhazians told me that this did not stop them hunting wild boars and eating pork, though.

Anyway, in 1989-1992 the Abkhazians did their best to distance themselves from Islam and emphasize their ancient Christian roots. For example, S. Lakoba argued that the Abkhazians were baptized in early medieval times and that, in contrast, Islam (which had been introduced in the 16th – 17th centuries) had never enjoyed full acknowledgement. Instead, he reminded readers of successful attempts by both the Arabs and Turks to Islamize the Georgians (Lakoba 1995: 101-102. Also see Tsvinaria 1989). More than ten years ago Abkhazian scholars became very interested in their Christian heritage. Even earlier, both Anchabadze and Inal-Ipa had pointed out that Christianity was introduced very early to the Abkhazians.

In 1989, certain Abkhazian intellectuals did their best to prove that St. Nino had arrived in the Caucasus by sea and first baptized the Abkhazians, after which she moved to Georgia. Yet, very soon they gave up this idea, for St. Nino's image was alien to the Abkhazians. At the same time, she was highly appreciated by the Georgians as their first enlightener. In October 1989, they decided to put up a statue of her at the Museum of Archaeological Expeditions in Tbilisi, and in June 1991, the Georgian Church celebrated the anniversary of St. Nino's arrival in Javakheti. Indeed, according to Church tradition, she came to Mtskheta along the Kura River Valley (Igumen Vladimir, Vigilianskii 1992). At the same time, Church tradition also told that St. Andrew had brought Christianity to Sukhum, Mingrelia, Ossetia and some other regions. As we already know, the Abkhazian archaeologist, M. Gunba, revived Basaria's ideas (Basaria 1923: 77) in the 1980s and based his own arguments about the introduction of Christianity into Abkhazia on the legend of St. Andrew's trip. Not only did he give an implausibly early date for that, he also did his best to prove that Christianity was rapidly accepted by all the local inhabitants (Gunba 1989a: 81-97). Other Abkhazian authors were more careful. Yet some of them argued that Christianity was established in Abkhazia from the very late 3rd – very early 4th centuries A.D. (Bgazhba 1998: 60).

To put it other way, the dispute focused on who was baptized first – the Georgians or the Abkhazians (Shnirelman 1989a. Also see Belaia kniga 1993: 24). All of this caused a curious tendency at the time of the Georgian-Abkhazian war of 1992-1993. Some Abkhazians tried hard to return to Christianity. It was emphasized in a propaganda booklet, published at that time, that Abkhazia was an early Christian country (Marykhuba 1993: 38). Moreover, certain Abkhazian intellectuals

attempted to prove that Abkhazia was a country of genuine “pre-Flood” monotheism and the homeland of its bearers, the Japhetids, “proto-Abkhazians” who brought this concept to all the other peoples. In this view, the route of their migration is marked by early dolmens. Their missionary activity resulted in the formation of the group of peoples who made up the basis for the future Christian world. In particular, it is from the Abkhazian lands that the Semitic peoples borrowed the monotheist tradition. Although Christianity itself had emerged outside Abkhazia, the Abkhazians were among the first people who were baptized by St. Andrew. These intellectuals claimed that there was no other path of Abkhazian development except within the Orthodox Christian tradition (Regelson, Khvartskii 1997: 105-117, 507-511, 515-516, 533-534, 555).

This tendency did not enjoy mass support though, because, due to intensive Georgian propaganda, Christianity began to be closely associated with Georgia and the Georgians, and that did not meet the demand for an Abkhazian identity. That is why, recently, the revival of traditional animist beliefs can be observed in Abkhazia that are closely related to the concept of “apsuara” or “Abkhazianness”, that are the basis of the Abkhazian worldview and behavioral stereotypes (Smyr 1994: 19; Chitasheva 1995; Shnirelman 1998b: 16-17). For example, there was a call for such a revival by the Minister of Public Education and Culture of Abkhazia, at the World Congress of the Abkhazian-Abaza people held in October 1993 (Nasha sila 1993: 15). Yet, Christianity enjoyed some support in Abkhazia, in particular due to the energy of a new young priest in Novy Afon. It is worth noting that Christianity develops peacefully side by side with animism, and this priest, with an icon in his hands, sometimes participates in major animist ceremonies (A. Inal-Ipa. Personal communication, June 2000).

At the very end of the 1980s, the demographic issue proved to be a new field for the Georgian-Abkhazian ideological battle. For the first time, this was clearly formulated in the “Abkhazian letter”. Then, discussions were actively developed by Inal-Ipa and other Abkhazian authors (Inal-Ipa 1989a, 1990, 1992: 115-136; Lakoba, Shamba 1989; Kvarchia, Achugba 1991). In fact, the discourse was pushed forward by numerous statements by Gamsakhurdia and other Georgian political activists who argued that 17 percent of population of Abkhazia (i.e. ethnic Abkhazians) enjoyed unbelievable privileges, as though they had exploited all the rest of the people of the republic (for example, see Gamsakhurdia 1989). That was why Abkhazian scholars delved deeper into ethno-demographic statistics, which demonstrated dramatic changes in the ethnic composition of the local population during the last 100-150 years. During this period, the Abkhazians turned from the dominant majority into an ethnic minority in Abkhazia (Muller 1998).

Inal-Ipa was one of the first to begin to analyze the nature of this ethno-demographic shift. He argued that, until the mid-19th century, the Abkhazians lived in the territory between the Inguri River in the southeast and the city of Sochi in the northwest. However, the territory run by the potentate of Abkhazia was smaller. It embraced the lands between the Inguri and the Bzyb’ Rivers. Inal-Ipa maintained

that all these lands were occupied chiefly by Abkhazians. There were almost no other ethnic elements there. The Caucasian War and some other wars of the late 19th century had resulted in the Abkhazian tragedy – Maxadzhirstvo, i.e. the resettlement of a great number of Abkhazians in Turkey between the 1840s and the very late 1870s. It is difficult to provide a precise number of migrants. Yet, Inal-Ipa estimated it at a hundred of thousands of people. He also referred to the American researcher, E. Toledano, who mentioned that 150 thousand people were forced out in 1863 alone. However, all these numbers contradicted the data of Inal-Ipa himself, who wrote that there were a total of 100-150 thousand Abkhazians by the mid-19th century.

Anyway, all the lands north of the Bzyb' River, as well as the central part of Abkhazia, (Sukhumi and Gul'ripsh regions) were depopulated through forcible resettlement. It is there that a stream of new settlers (Russians, Armenians, and Greeks), who had to serve the Russification policy of the Tsarist government, was directed. As a result, as early as 1873, Sukhum was a city mainly of Russians, Greeks, Armenians and Mingrelians. Inal-Ipa especially emphasized the Mingrelians and pointed out that the measures implemented by the Russian authorities in order to restrict their migration did not help much. Indeed, despite all the attempts of the Georgian demographer, A. Totadze, to prove that the resettlement of the Mingrelian peasants was hampered by numerous artificial obstacles, it is evident from his own statistic that, between 1886 and 1926, the number of Georgians in Abkhazia increased by 34 thousand people, i.e. almost doubled (Totadze 1994: 13, 37). The Mingrelians already accounted for 64 percent of the overall population in the Sukhumi region in the early 1870s (Muller 1998: 222, 226). Mass Mingrelian resettlements in Abkhazia were especially encouraged in the 1930s – 1950s, i.e. within living memory. As a result, whereas the Abkhazians still made up the predominant majority (55.3 percent) of the population in Abkhazia in 1897, their share had dropped to 15.1 percent by 1959 (Inal-Ipa 1989a, 1990, 1992: 127-147; Lakoba, Shamba 1989; Shamba, Lakoba 1995: 12-15; Chumalov 1995: 63-67; Belaia kniga 1993: 30).

True, certain Abkhazian authors were too incautious in their dealing with the early less reliable demographic evidence and carelessly referred to population numbers that had to be put into doubt. For example, with reference to Gulia (Gulia 1925: 294), V. Kvarchia and T. Achugba pointed to the decrease in the Abkhazian population from 600 thousand to 200 thousand people between the mid-17th and the end of the 18th centuries (Kvarchia, Achugba 1991: 145). Their other statistical data on the bulk of the 19th century, when there were no censuses at all, were also highly doubtful (Totadze 1994: 6-7; Muller 1998: 219).

Anyway, Abkhazian scholars did their best to demonstrate that up to 1870 the Abkhazian region was populated entirely by ethnic Abkhazians and that from the mid-1880s on, their share in the overall Abkhazian population progressively decreased. They referred to the fact that, on the eve of World War I, the Abkhazians still predominated demographically, accounting for about 60 percent of the

population. Indeed, according to a value free researcher, they accounted for 60.9 percent of the population of Abkhazia in the early 1870s (Muller 1998: 222). Their sharp demographic decline was caused, in the Abkhazian view, by the intentional policies of the Georgian authorities. First, under the Men'sheviks, the inhabitants of Samurzaqano were registered as Georgians. Then, the same occurred during the national censuses of 1926 and 1939. Mass resettlements of Georgians to Abkhazia were encouraged in the 1940s-1950s, when, on the other hand, some ethnic minorities (Meskhetian Turks, Greeks, Assyrians, and Kurds) were deported out of Georgia (Sagaria 1990; Ashkharua 1993). As a result, during slightly more than 100 years, the Abkhazians lost their predominant position and turned into an insignificant minority. Between 1897 and 1989, the Abkhazians grew in numbers from 58,697 to 93,267, and the Georgians in Abkhazia from 25,875 to 239,872. As a result, in 1989 the Abkhazians accounted for 17.8 percent, and the Georgians for 45.7 percent of the population in Abkhazia (Hewitt 1993: 269). Thus, Abkhazian authors concluded, the sharp decrease of both the relative and absolute number of Abkhazians in Abkhazia was caused by the "mechanical growth of the non-Abkhazian population and, partly, by artificial assimilation of the Abkhazians" (Kvarchia, Achugba 1991: 146-150. Also see Lakoba 1990a: 99-100; Marykhuba 1994b: 24-25; Dzaphsba 1996: 60-62).

The Georgian view is different, as reflected in what President Edward Shevardnadze said in the Georgian parliament in October 1992. At that time, he maintained that the drop in the Abkhazian share of the population of Abkhazia was a natural process that had nothing to do with the Georgians. To put it another way, he did his best to disprove the idea that the resettlement of the Georgians to Abkhazia was intentionally organized by Georgian authorities (Hewitt 1995: 57). Since that time, Georgian authors have begun to argue that the Georgian migrations did not affect demographic processes in Abkhazia in any significant way. Then again, even if the migrations were induced artificially, that was done for the best, in order to confront counter-migrations of Russian-speaking people. The Georgian demographer, A. Totadze, came to grips with this problem most firmly. Whereas, by Abkhazian estimates, Abkhazians accounted for 85.7 percent of the population in Abkhazia in 1886 (Kvarchia, Achugba 1991: 147), Totadze gave different numbers and argued that they already constituted a minority at that time (Totadze 1994: 7). What was the nature of these contradictions?

One of the hottest issues, which inflames endless disputes between the Abkhazians and the Georgians, deals with the problem of historical Samurzaqano (the contemporary Gali region of Abkhazia). This region is a permanent apple of discord between the Abkhazians and the Mingrelians. This made the Russian authorities take it under their own control as early as 1845. Abkhazian authors emphasize that initially this land was occupied by Abkhazians. It was seized by the Mingrelian rulers in the very late 13th – very early 14th centuries. Yet, it was taken back by the Abkhazian Principality in the 17th century (Dzidzaria 1960: 100 ff.; 1961: 18; Inal-Ipa 1965: 142; Anchabadze 1976: 67; Lakoba, Shamba 1989; Inal-

Ipa 1992: 110-111; Lakoba 1993: 162-164). It is worth noting that Basaria noted that the name “Samurzaqano” itself derived its origin from the name Murza-khan (“Murzakan” in Abkhazian), who was born to the Shirvashidze family and ruled the territory between the Okhurei and Inguri Rivers (in the far south of Abkhazia) (Basaria 1923: 98).

Whereas many Mingrelians lived there during the period of Mingrelian rule, later Abkhazians made up the great bulk of the population (Anchabadze 1976: 67; Anchabadze et al. 1986: 60-61; Kvarchia, Achugba 1991: 144). Yet, Samurzaqano was greatly affected by the Mingrelians once again in the early 19th century. In 1811-1813, many Mingrelians found refuge there from famine and epidemic, and after 1813, the region once again joined the Mingrelian principality for some time. However, in the Abkhazian authors’ view, all of this had not resulted in any significant changes in the ethnic composition of the population. Indeed, even in the very early 20th century, the Mingrelians accounted for only 13 percent of the population there, and in the 19th century the local residents use to identify themselves with the Abkhazians (Basaria 1923: 100; Pachulia 1976: 151; Inal-Ipa 1989a, 1990: 39-40, 1992: 117-119; Kvarchia, Achugba 1991: 146; Lakoba 1993: 163). At the same time, Abkhazian-Mingrelian mixed marriages became popular there from the late 19th century, and Mingrelian was already predominant at the end of the 19th century. The matter of culture and self-awareness was somewhat more complicated. Inal-Ipa pointed out that the local inhabitants held either Abkhazian or “Samurzaqano” identity even after the language shift had occurred¹¹²). K. D. Machavariani had already convincingly substantiated this in 1899 (Inal-Ipa 1992: 121-122; Hewitt 1996: 200-201). Moreover, the Samurzaqano residents identified themselves with the Abkhazians even in the early 1920s, and this was recorded by the local census of 1922/1923 (Muller 1998: 226). However, they were forcibly recorded as Georgians during the census of 1926, and this was repeated once more in 1935, when people received their new passports (Marykhuba 1994b: 19, 57). As a result, almost all the local residents identify themselves as Mingrelians nowadays, although they enjoy a mixed Abkhazian-Mingrelian culture (Basaria 1923: 101-102; Inal-Ipa 1989a; 1990: 40-42. For the deep Abkhazian past in Samurzaqano, see Inal-Ipa 1992: 84-114).

The Svans also migrated in the recent past. There were no Svans north of the Upper Inguri River before the mid-19th century. Later on, they moved northwest, and reached the Upper Kodori River where the “Abkhazian Svaneti” was established (Inal-Ipa 1989a, 1990: 39-42).

In the meantime, Georgian authors viewed the matter quite differently. First, they maintain that the Abkhazians illegally seized part of the Mingrelian territory at the end of the 17th century and assimilated the Mingrelian population. Second, they believe that the Mingrelians always lived there. It is difficult for contemporary Georgians to imagine that the situation could have been different in the past (Koranashvili 1989a; Tskitishvili 1989; Muskhelishvili 1990: 11-12; Antelava 1990: 24; Gvantseladze 1992; Totadze 1994: 8-9; Nadareishvili 1996: 11-12,

21; Gamakharia, Gogia 1997: 58-60). Yet, this approach was developed by the Georgians relatively recently. The first to identify the Mingrelians with the Samurzaqano people was Ya. Gogebashvili. He was a well-known activist in public education in Georgia in the late 19th century. Just after the Russian-Turkish war of 1877 – 1878, he published a series of articles calling on the Mingrelians to colonize the devastated Abkhazian lands (for that, see Lakoba 1993: 206-207; Marykhuba 1994b: 21-22). At that time he exploited the ecological argument, and argued that the Mingrelians were much better adapted to living in the marshy lowlands than anybody else. At the same time, he recognized that initially the Samurzaqano people belonged to the “Abkhazian race”, and were greatly affected by the Mingrelians later on. Yet, in a children’s book published slightly later, he maintained without reserve that the “Mingrelians and the Samurzaqano residents were the same people” (for that, see Hewitt 1993: 275, 1998: 118). In fact, Gogebashvili claimed that Abkhazia, rendered lifeless after the maxadzhihs had left, could only be settled by the Mingrelians (Lakoba 1993: 207; Lakoba 1998a: 84-85). It is worth mentioning that it is in this intellectual environment that, in the late 1870s, D. Bakradze began to view the Georgians (Mingrelians) as the indigenous inhabitants of the east Black Sea region between the Kuban’ River in the north and Trebizond in the south. He treated the Abkhazians as later newcomers (Bakradze 1878: VI. For that, see Marykhuba 1994b: 20).

That is why, while ignoring historical changes, Georgian demographers unreservedly equate the Samurzaqano people with the Mingrelians¹¹³). They accuse the Abkhazians of including the Samurzaqano people of the late 19th century in their own community (for example, see Totadze 1994: 8). Totadze believes that the fact that the Samurzaqano people did not take part in the Maxadzhiirstvo is clear evidence that they did not associate themselves with the Abkhazians (Totadze 1994: 8). By contrast, Basaria pointed out that when, after the revolution of 1917, the Georgian authorities strove to break Samurzaqano away from Abkhazia and include it in Kutaisi Province, the local residents made a strong protest, and the authorities had to give up this plan. For him, that was evidence that they identified themselves with the Abkhazians (Basaria 1923: 103). Actually, both authors made the same methodological mistake. Indeed, there are no good grounds to link political behavior firmly with ethnicity alone.

A result of the manipulations of the ethno-demographic data is that the Georgian and Abkhazian population figures for the end of the 19th – beginning of the 20th century reveal dramatic inconsistencies. For example, according to Abkhazian calculations, there were 58,963 Abkhazians and about 4,000 Georgians in Abkhazia in 1886 (Lakoba 1990a: 99; Kvarchia, Achugba 1991: 147). In the Georgian view, these figures were 28,320 and 34,806, respectively (Totadze 1994: 13, 1995: 31). It is worth noting that the Abkhazian calculations are in good agreement with the national census of 1897. It is instructive that the Georgian demographer drops the latter’s data out of his demographic table¹¹⁴). He ignores the 1939 census, as well. Yet, the latter, taken together with the following censuses,

provides strong evidence of the dramatic growth of the Georgian population in Abkhazia from 91,967 people in 1939 to 158,221 in 1959 (Lakoba 1990a: 99; Kvarchia, Achugba 1991: 149. Also see Hewitt 1993: 269, 272). Following Totadze, other Georgian ideologists perform the same manipulation of the statistical data (Antelava 1990: 28; Chabukiani 1995: 38, table 8; Nadareishvili 1996: 21).

Thus, whereas the Georgian demographer strove to demonstrate more careful and professional analysis of the ethno-demographic data, he proved the obvious tendency to downplay the Abkhazian demographic losses of Maxadzhirstvo, to exaggerate the Georgian presence in Abkhazia in the 19th century, and to downplay the Georgian role in the drastic demographic changes of the mid-20th century. While manipulating the population numbers, he emphasized that the Georgian population increased 3.1 times in Abkhazia, whereas the Russian population increased 6.6 times (Totadze 1994: 12, 1995: 25-31). Yet, in reality, the absolute rather than the relative numbers are of most practical importance, and they were disproportionate. The Russian population increased by 68,000 people in that period (59,300 people, according to the Abkhazian data. See Lakoba 1990a: 99), whereas the Georgian one increased by 145,000, i.e. twice as much¹¹⁵). Then, the main body of the Mingrelian migrants arrived in Abkhazia in the 1940s, when the Georgian authorities did their best to turn the Abkhazians into an insignificant minority (Muller 1998: 236).

These ethno-demographic manipulations are by no means all innocent. It is with reference to them that Gamsakhurdia argued that “pristine” Georgian lands were incorporated into Abkhazia and that in contemporary Abkhazia the Abkhazian ethnic minority illegally “dominated over the rest of population” (Gamsakhurdia 1989). At the same time, it is worth mentioning that both the migrants themselves and their Abkhazian neighbors had a clear memory of the resettlement. According to my informant, 55 Mingrelian families settled in his village in 1948-1949. All of them knew quite well how that had occurred. None of them would even think of the place as non-Abkhazian land (Shnirelman 1989a. Also see Bakhia 1989; Dzhokhadze 1989).

Meanwhile, with reference to the theory of “dual aboriginality”, the Georgian demographer maintained that the Georgians were the “indigenous inhabitants of Abkhazia”, which excused their mass resettlement. Moreover, pointing to certain Autonomous Republics and Autonomous Regions of the Russian Federation, where the indigenous peoples also proved to be numerically small, he emphasized that their share in the power structures was even less there than their share in the population. With reference to the reverse pattern in Abkhazia, he came to the conclusion that there was discrimination against Georgians there (Totadze 1994: 13-18. Also see Gvantseladze 1992).

He intentionally confused ethnicity with citizenship and, referring to medieval chroniclers, maintained that the Georgians and the Abkhazians already constituted one people in the 11th – 15th centuries. Note that he included the Ossetians in this “people” as well. Moreover, in search of arguments, he recalled Delba’s definition

that “Abkhazians were the same as Georgians”. Yet, he failed to mention the environment in the 1940s when this was said (Totadze 1994: 18-19, 1995: 34). Finally, he went so far as to argue that, “while fighting in Abkhazia, the Georgians are not only defending their own land but are also rescuing Abkhazia and the Abkhazian people from disappearing” (Totadze 1994: 38). To put it differently, the abolition of Abkhazian autonomy, the destruction of the Abkhazian cultural and intellectual heritage, and the killing of Abkhazians were represented as good for the Abkhazian people. Suffice it to say that the Abkhazian population in Abkhazia decreased from 97,000 to 90,000 people between 1989 and 1999 (Globachev 1999: 27).

Another Georgian author put forward different arguments. He believed that the mass Mingrelian resettlement to Abkhazia in the 1940s was a defensive measure in order to stop the Russians, who had been moving there over the two preceding decades. This could result in the Russification and assimilation of the Abkhazians. Indeed, a substantial flow of Russians to Abkhazia was observed between 1926 and 1939 (Muller 1998: 235). Thus, in the view of this Georgian author, the Georgian authorities implemented an adequate demographic policy in response. That was an anti-imperialist rather than an anti-Abkhazian policy, in his opinion (Gvantseladze 1992). The Georgianization of the Abkhazians seemed to him far preferable to their Russification. He also failed to mention that the policy in question was directed from Moscow rather than from Tbilisi. Finally, a very popular opinion among the Georgians is that many Georgians, who lived in Abkhazia, were pressed to be recorded as “Abkhazians” on their passports. Thus, the official number of Abkhazians became higher than it was in fact (Gvantseladze 1992; G. Pipia 1995: 21). Everybody who knows how the Mingrelians all over Georgia, including Abkhazia, were forcibly recorded as “Georgians” would doubt this idea.

Thus, whereas the Georgians were most attached to state integrity, and were fixated on an integral view of history, language and culture because of that, the Abkhazians worried about maintaining their distinction and resisted possible Georgianization. It is in this context that in 1989 both sides viewed the very sensitive Mingrelian issue from opposite viewpoints. At that time, side by side with other informal organizations, the movement for Mingrelian autonomy emerged in western Georgia. The group used to disseminate leaflets calling for separation from Georgia. Passions were especially aroused during the national census of 1989, when certain Sukhumi Georgians, fascinated by slogans about “democracy” and “freedom of speech” attempted to register themselves as Mingrelians. However, they were pressed by the head of the census campaign to change their identity to Georgian (Shnirelman 1989a).

Naturally, the Mingrelians were angry with that. The Gudauta newspaper, “Bzyb”, published letters from Mingrelians who, for the first time in many decades, began to insist on their distinct identity. They complained about the unjust attitude towards the Mingrelian language, about the disappearance of Mingrelian identity from the Soviet censuses after 1926, and about the imposition of Georgian identity

upon the Mingrelians (Bokuchava-Gogulia 1989; Dzhozhuva 1989, 1990. For that, see Hewitt 1995a: 303-305, 1999: 489-490). Abkhazian authors strove to exploit the Mingrelian issue in order to demonstrate the existence of discrimination against ethnic minorities in Georgia (Ya. Lakoba 1989; Tsvinaria 1989). In order to manifest their sympathy to the Mingrelians, Abkhazian authorities promoted the introduction of Mingrelian courses in the school curricula in the Gali region in 1993 – 1994 (Hewitt 1995a: 308), and attempted to publish the newspaper “Gal” in three languages there – Abkhazian, Russian and Mingrelian (Hewitt 1999: 477). At the meantime, the majority of the Mingrelian refugees who had returned to the Gali region avoided supporting the Abkhazian policy of “Mingrelization” (A. Inal-Ipa. Personal communication. June 2000).

At the same time, the Georgians viewed the Mingrelian aspiration to emphasize their authentic identity as simply a threat to the integrated “Georgian national organism”. The Mingrelian issue got especially hot at the very beginning of the 1990s, when the Mingrelian-born President Gamsakhurdia was shaping a new Georgian political elite made up of Mingrelians and their neighbor Svans (Boikova 1991). It is no accident that after his fall, he found the most support in Mingrelia (Goldenberg 1994: 86). In order to avoid stirring up emotions in Mingrelia, Georgian ideologues did their best to emphasize the close relationships between the Kartvelian and the Mingrelian languages, and any hint of Mingrelian authenticity was perceived in Georgia as a Mingrelian aspiration for separatism (for example, see Totadze 1994: 19-21). All attempts by an English philologist to protect the Mingrelian language and identity are treated in Georgia simply as “anti-Georgian activity” (Totadze 1994: 20-21, 42; Gamakharia, Gogia 1997: 17). Mingrelians who asserted their authenticity were persecuted (Hewitt 1996: 214, note 50).

By contrast, the Abkhazians always emphasized their tolerance towards various ethnic and religious groups. Once, S. Basaria pointed out Abkhazian indifference towards “nationalism” and their inherent respect for human rights (Basaria 1923: 85-86). Recently, the Abkhazians link this altruistic stance with their moral concept of “*apsuara*” (Ashkharua 1993). The latter is manifested by the new national symbol, adopted by the Republic of Abkhazia. First, this symbol is characterized by intentional eclecticism. It includes, on the one hand, early Genoan symbols, and on the other hand, colors symbolic of the Mountain Republic of 1918 – 1921. Second, the combination of white and green stripes on the contemporary Abkhazian banner, where white is associated with Christianity and green with Islam, is intended to demonstrate religious tolerance (Marykhuba 1993: 37-38)¹¹⁶. The Abkhazian right to their state symbol was approved by the Abkhazian-Georgia agreement, signed in Moscow on April 4, 1994 (Hewitt 1999: 477).

The intellectual debates in question demonstrate perfectly well how and for

what goal the ethnocentric approach “helps” to resolve complicated problems of the remote past. For example, scholars still lack any reliable evidence to resolve the Colchian Kingdom issue convincingly. Notwithstanding, Georgian historians and archaeologists emphatically advocate a view of a viable and powerful early Kingdom in western Georgia that facilitates claims for the civilizing role of the Georgians and, thus, their power over the east Black Sea region.

Thus, the ideological struggle between the Georgians and the Abkhazians is waged, first, for cultural supremacy (i.e. who was the first to discover iron, to be baptized, to introduce a writing system. They also discuss the ethnic origins of the well-known cultural activists of the past). Second, it is waged for territorial supremacy (who had the right to claim indigenous status in Abkhazia and its lands). Finally, it is over state supremacy (who founded the first state in western Transcaucasia). In the views of both sides, any particular resolution of the issues in question should legitimize the right of one of them to own the Abkhazian territory and to enjoy political power there. This became especially meaningful during the last few years when the Abkhazian struggle for sovereignty reached its climax. That is why the Georgian-Abkhazian discourse on what happened in the remote past extended far beyond historical disciplines, and both sides treat the solutions, unacceptable to themselves, as an encroachment upon a sacred national place. One cannot disagree with M. Chumalov in that the Georgian-Abkhazian war was preceded by an “ideological struggle” focused on the interpretation of the Abkhazian past (cited from Khoshtaria-Brosse 1993: 128)¹⁷). Both sides were well aware of that, and it is no accident that, when passions reached a climax, certain Georgian and Abkhazian authors warned against the abuse of prehistory and early history, and called on people to avoid using an intellectual controversy as a means of political confrontation (Trapsh 1989; G. Pipiia 1995: 22; Marshania 1995: 197).

Like the Armenian one, the Georgian identity is shaped mostly by language. To be a Georgian means most of all to speak Georgian. As we know, the language factor plays an important role in shaping the concept of Georgian ethnogenesis, which imposes Georgian upon all Georgian ancestors. At the same time, while the linguistic factor plays an isolating role among the Armenians, it is viewed as a basis for integration by the Georgians. That is why, whereas Georgian proper (Kartvelian) differs a great deal from the Mingrelian and Svan languages, although it is in the same family, Georgians ignore this difference. They elaborate their ethnogenetic schema and identify all those who ever spoke a language belonging to this family of languages as their ancestors. Moreover, while developing the idea of Iberian-Caucasian relationships, they did their best to include both North Caucasian (Abkhazian-Adyghe and Nakh-Daghestani) peoples and their linguistically dead relatives, the Hurrians, the Urartians and the Hatti, in this entity. Thus, the Georgian ethnogenesis strove to integrate the cultural heritage of all these peoples, and provided grounds for both the assimilation of certain non-Georgian groups (Abkhazians) and for claiming their territories. As a result, the Georgian ethnogenetic schema played and still plays a big political role, while elaborating an

ideological basis for national unity that incorporated as many local Caucasian residents as possible, appropriating the early historical heritage of the neighboring peoples, and claiming territories beyond the borders of contemporary Georgia.

In fact, the Georgian-Abkhazian confrontation included the intellectual appropriation of an alien past, which actually contained many shared elements. Instead of providing an easing of the situation, the latter aggravated it, since the past is one of the major symbols of identity. In these circumstances, in order to integrate an ethnic minority, the dominant majority emphasizes cultural or linguistic similarities and a shared past. On the opposite side, to resist assimilation an ethnic minority stresses distinctions and the authenticity of both its culture and its past. In the interests of integration, the majority bends all its effort to including the minority's past into its own. The more successful the majority is in the political subjugation of the minority the more persistently it occupies itself with the appropriation of the minority's past and ascription of the latter to its own ancestors. This is how a myth of everlasting and unbroken national unity is forged. Meanwhile, if the minority's representation of the past is hampered or persecuted, its ideology becomes more radical, and its myth of the past suffers from megalomania.

The ethnogenetic myths of the Georgians and Abkhazians are built up in opposition to each other. If statehood makes up the core of the Georgian myth, then the Abkhazian one is based on the idea of aboriginality. Both myths compete for the most remote past and for the heritage of the Near Eastern civilizations. At the same time, both of them value indigenous status. To give but one recent example, it was claimed at the World Congress of the Abkhazian-Abasa people, held in October 1992, that, wherever the Abkhazians lived nowadays, Apsny was their ancestors' land, their cradle, the homeland of their language (Nasha sila 1993: 4). Meanwhile, the Abkhazians are content with cultural continuity over millennia, whereas the Georgians combine this with state continuity. For the Georgians, the idea of state is closely related to identity, to the Georgian spirit. By contrast, the Abkhazians acknowledge multi-culturalism and multi-profession of faith, and the Abkhazian myth puts the emphasis on tolerance. True, in their struggle against the Georgian myth, the Abkhazians also emphasize state continuity, but to them continuity for 1,200 years seems sufficient. Yet, according to the Abkhazian ethnologist, Yu. Argun, "We need a state not for the sake of a state as such, but to protect us and to secure the millennial Abkhazian culture – apswara" (Nasha sila 1993: 63). Sometimes, the Abkhazians emphasize the homogeneity of the population in Abkhazia until the mid-19th century. This is by no means a crucial point of the Abkhazian myth. It is a consequence of the competition with the Georgian myth, which insists on the idea of the "dual aboriginality" that implies that the Georgians always lived in Abkhazia and were even the dominant majority there from time immemorial. The Abkhazians were especially indignant that the concept of "dual aboriginality" even found a place in books dealing with the Constitution of the USSR (Marykhuba 1994a: 446, 458). They treated that as a dreadful threat to their

own people.

The Georgian myth has a major influence on Georgian political orientations, and it was no accident that a partisan of this myth, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, won the first presidential elections in democratic Georgia in 1990. It was also no accident that the first actions of his political movement in 1989 and of his government, later on, caused escalation of ethnic tensions and conflicts in the Ossetian, Azeri, Armenian, Ajar and Abkhazian regions of Georgia (Jones 1992: 80-81; Goldenberg 1994: 100-101). The ethnic minorities immediately understood the nature of this myth directed against them. Nowadays Georgian experts themselves recognize close links between unrest among ethnic minorities and the chauvinist rhetoric of the Gamsakhurdia regime (Nodia 1998: 30; Kokoev, Svanidze 2000: 39).

For the Abkhazians, the debates in question are by no means all only theoretical. They deal with their urgent vital interests. Since November 1988, Georgian nationalists have openly demonstrated their intention to eliminate Abkhazian autonomy, and in 1991, president Gamsakhurdia managed to resettle 4,000 Avars to Dagestan. While addressing Georgian chauvinist propaganda of 1988-1989, the Abkhazians were quite nervous about the future of the Abkhazian Republic and felt threatened by the coming assimilation by the Georgians. The Avars' resettlement seemed to confirm their worst fears. Being aware of their few numbers in Abkhazia, the Abkhazians were certain that if democratic elections were held, they would lose access to power, i.e. the right to control the territory where their ancestors had lived for centuries. The Georgians were quite aware of this as well (for example, see Antelava 1990: 26-27). That is why the Abkhazians were very sensitive about the main point of Georgian historiography, which argued that the Georgians were the first settlers in Abkhazia. The Abkhazians understood quite well that, if this idea took root in Georgian minds, it would be able to powerfully affect the choice of the electorate, which would lose an important inducement to vote for Abkhazian candidates (Shnirelman 1989a; Shamba 1990: 8). Indeed, voting behavior in post-Soviet republics demonstrates that regardless of ethnic affiliation, people are inclined to support the candidates of the titular population (cf. Beissinger 1997: 166).

As it was put by my Abkhazian informant in the fall of 1989, it would be an insult for the Abkhazians to be Georgian citizens, for that would mean learning both the Georgian language and culture, i.e. a threat to the Abkhazian language and culture (Shnirelman 1989a). The war of 1992-1993 confirmed these alarms. It convinced the Abkhazians that the Georgian authorities were striving to build up a monoethnic state, that did not acknowledge any ethnic minority rights (for that, see Ashkharua 1993; Lakoba 1995: 99, 101). It is the aim of the monoethnic state which is the basis of the Georgian ethnogenetic myth discussed above. At the same time, the Abkhazians bear in mind the federal political structure of Georgia, which should secure rights for ethnic minorities (Shamba 1990: 8).

In order to understand the dramatic essence of the Georgian-Abkhazian intellectual confrontation, one has to bear in mind that under the hierarchical Soviet

ethno-administrative system, the cultural and social status of any ethnic group was closely connected with its political status. This caused unequal perspectives for further development (Gogua 1989) and colored political relationships between peoples, while affecting their vital interests and fostering an inferiority complex among ethnic minorities. While responding to their Georgian counterparts, Abkhazian authors emphasized the abnormality of the situation, where people were being convinced that they did not constitute a distinct people, and at the same time were called to live in “peace” and “friendship” with the dominant majority (Lakoba, Shamba 1989). It is in this environment that ethnic minorities are searching for “historic justice”. In 1989, I was introduced to a whole list of Georgian scholarly publications that were treated as “anti-Abkhazian” by Abkhazian scholars.

True, over recent years, the idea of a broad federalism is more and more appreciated by the Georgian public (Kokoev, Svanidze 2000). According to a sociological survey carried out in Georgia in 1997-1999, tolerance towards both the Abkhazians and Ossetians is growing among the Georgians (Dzebisashvili 2000: 154). Thus, there is hope for positive changes in Georgian-Abkhazian relationships. At the same time, these changes are apparently hampered by the fact that the view of the Abkhazian past, based on Ingoroqva’s ideas and objected to by the Abkhazians, is still being taught in Georgian schools (Lakoba 2000: 18).

NOTES

Introduction: Myths, Symbols and Politics

1. For these two approaches to the past, see Ben-Yehuda 1995: 273-274.
2. Stephen Velychenko (1993) has successively examined some of these factors.

Part I The Armenian-Azeri Confrontation

1. For his professional career, see Yakobson 2000.
2. While sharing this concept in general, Diakonov put into doubt the idea that the name “Armens” existed at this early age, because it has never been a self-designation of the Armenians. He also denied the possibility of any connections between them and the Hayasa (Diakonov 1983: 167, 172).
3. Most scholars do not share Manandian’s view of Hayasa localization and its identification with Nairi. For example, see Redgate 1998: 26-27. Yet, a foreign Armenian historian, V. Kurkjan (1958: 32), agreed with Manandian .
4. For a criticism of the proto-Armenian links with Hayasa, see Diakonov 1968: 209-213
5. For Marr’s influence on Kapantsian, see Djahukian 1967a: 28; Diakonov 1968: 213.
6. In his earlier works, Kapantsian was more inclined to acknowledge a major contribution from the Phrygian cultural sub-stratum. For example, see Kapantsian 1956: 267-327. For an Indo-European affiliation of the Armenian language and the erroneous nature of Kapantsian’s linguistic arguments, see Diakonov 1968: 202-203.
7. For role of the Scythian chief, Partatua/Paroyr, who led an uprising against the Assyrians, see Piotrovsky 1959; Russell 1997: 27.
8. True, N. V. Khazaradze, who studied these materials came to quite the opposite conclusion and identified the Mushki with the “Kartvelians”. See Khazaradze 1984.
9. For the erroneous nature of this approach, see Diakonov 1968: 213-214.
10. There are more reasons to relate the Hayasa language to Northwestern Caucasian group though. See Diakonov 1968: 84.
11. For his contribution to the studies of Urartu and the development of Transcaucasian archaeology, see Areshian 1992a.
12. In fact, the country of Nairi was first, situated to the southeast of Hayasa, second, had very arbitrary borders, and third, consisted of a few dozen kingdoms with highly heterogeneous populations. There was no question of there being any uniform people there. See Diakonov 1968: 88, 99; Redgate 1998: 27.
13. For him and his historical ideas, see also Astourian 1994: 45-47.
14. For example, Ishkhanian’s approach deprives the well-known Armenian writer and public activist, Z. Balaian, of an Armenian identity because the latter spoke and wrote Russian and was incompetent in Armenian. Ishkhanian was aware of that (Ishkhanian 1991: 26).
15. For the first time he “discovered” a “proto-Russian civilization” in the Lake Sevan region in the mid-1970s.
16. Yet, in an interview given in November 1989, Heydar Aliev denied any backwardness of Azerbaijan (Karaulov 1990: 243).
17. For his career, see Van der Leeuw 2000: 131-132.
18. Nowadays, the Azeri view of history is shared by Van der Leeuw (2000).
19. For the Armenian-Azeri conflict for Karabagh in details, see Croissant 1998.

20. For him, see Goldenberg 1994: 120-121.
21. In fact, these “natural borders” were defined by the policy of the Ottoman Empire, which, at that time, was planning to establish a satellite state there if not to annex a large part of Transcaucasia (Zubov 2000: 152).
22. Later on, in accordance with the Soviet hierarchical bureaucratic system, they tried to ascribe the initiative to the Chairman of the Azerbaijan government, N. Narimanov (Ibragimov, Tokarzhevsky 1964: 5). For Zifel’dt-Simumiagy, see Ashnin, Alpatov 2001.
23. Later on, Azerbaijani authors criticized him for that. See Ibragimov, Tokarzhevsky 1964: 11.
24. For Marr’s theory and its effects on the Soviet scholarship, see Alpatov 1991; Shnirelman 1995a; Slezkine 1996.
25. For Rasulzada, see Djavadi 1990: 100-101.
26. Recently a western scholar developed this Azeri argument. See van der Leeuw 2000: 19.
27. Later on, this would become commonplace in the Azeri concept of history. For example, see Guseinov 1958: 165-166.
28. For how this portrait came into being, see Diakonov 1995: 732.
29. For the role of Yampol’sky’s concepts in Azeri scholarship as seen from different angles, see Sumbatzade 1987: 109, 129; Melik-Oganjanian 1968: 170; Novosel’tsev 1991: 198.
30. Surprisingly, this approach is shared by Van der Leeuw (2000: 17).
31. For a criticism of this approach, see Aliev 1989: 138, note 211.
32. For sharp criticism of this approach, see Aliev 1990b: 158; Sumbatzade 1990: 76-77.
33. For the Persian nature of the movement from an Armenian point of view, see Bartkian 1989.
34. For the Sussanian nature of those constructions, see Aliev 1985.
35. For a criticism, see Aliev 1988a: 64; 1989a: 92.
36. In fact, classical evidence of the Caspians is scarce and obscure; and experts choose to avoid going deeply into this issue. For that, see Novosel’tsev 1979: 3; Akopian 1987: 50-55.
37. For a criticism of the volume, see Aliev 1988a: 64-66.
38. For a criticism of his reasoning, see Aliev 1988a: 63; 1989a: 95-97.
39. For a detailed criticism of Yusifov’s constructions, see Aliev 1989a.
40. Igrar Aliev treats his methodology as a restoration of the pre-scientific approach. For that see Aliev 1989a: 99-101, 1990b: 157. See also Buniatov 1987a.
41. It is worth noting that, in the view of some specialists, Avesta was actually composed in the territory of Media, but there are also other conceptions (Aliev 1960: 14, 1989c: 130).
42. True, some specialists refused to treat this political establishment as a real independent state, for it was a vassal of the Iraqi Sultanate. See Topuria 1982: 190.
43. Worth noting is Aliev’s consistency with criticism of the pan-Turkic interpretations of the Azeri past, beginning in the 1950s. For example, see Aliev 1960: 50-52, 112.
44. For details of Mamedov’s pan-Turkic concept, see Mamedov 1988.
45. Meanwhile an idea of very early states seems attractive for the Azeri scholars today, and they continue “discovering” them in the territory of Azerbaijan. A western scholar popularizes their “discoveries”. See Van der Leeuw 2000: 27-28.
46. It is worth noting that this Armenian view was entirely shared by the Russian Ambassador to Armenia in 1992-1994, V. Stupishin, who, following the pre-revolutionary Russian imperial tradition, called the Azeris the “Azeri Turks” and even the “Tatars”, and scared Russia with the idea of “pan-Turkism” (Stupishin 1998: 17-18 ff.).
47. For a sharp criticism of and striking arguments against this approach, see Akopian 1987:

- 227-236; Svazian 1991: 10.
48. For his Armenian genealogy, see Mnatsakanian, Sevak 1967: 184; Mnatsakanian 1969: 61; Ulubabian 1988: 88.
 49. For a criticism, see Svazian 1989a: 54.
 50. Yet, Heydar Aliev denied any ethnic tensions in the NKAR in the 1970s. For that, see Karaulov 1990: 250-251.
 51. Ulubabian (1981a) has recorded more than 180 Armenian inscriptions from the 10th – 13th centuries there. It seems like Geiushev (1984: 126) was the only Azeri scholar who recognized that there were many Armenian inscriptions in Gandzasar, but he still believed that the monastery was built and run by the Albanians.
 52. For a criticism of this trend, see Svazian 1991: 16-17.
 53. For the compiled nature of the manuscript in question, see Abegian 1948: 390-391; Mnatsakanian 1969: 86-87; Akopian 1987: 177-226. For a confirmation of the Armenian nature of the original manuscript by an independent scholar, see Thomson 1997: 230.
 54. Her next book met the same reaction. For example, see Arutiunian 1987.
 55. For the Georgian-Azeri dispute over the borderlands, see Muskhelishvili 1982; Muskhelishvili, Arveladze 1988: 140-141; Mamedova 1986: 127-143, 1987: 20-35; Velikhanova 1987: 63-66; Papuashvili 1987; Geibullaev 1989.
 56. For criticism of this approach, see Akopian 1987: 28-30.
 57. This particular paragraph was written by the well-known Armenian historian, Paruyr Muradian, and edited by someone else. Indeed, Muradian himself manifested a more careful approach. Cf. Galoian, Khudaverdian 1988: 10; Muradian 1990: 77-78.
 58. For the Armenian point of view expressed in Western literature, see Walker 1991: 73-90; Chorbajian, Donabedian, Mutafian 1994: 51-108.
 59. For a criticism of her concept, see Novosel'tsev 1991: 199-200.
 60. Erroneously, Altstadt (1992: 195) had confused him with the well-known human rights activist, the late academician Andrei D. Sakharov.
 61. The same irony had been expressed by Muradian towards the Azeri revisionists. See Muradian 1990: 118.
 62. It is worth recalling that, according to the Armenian authors, genuine historical Albania lay on the left of the Kura River before A.D. 428; it was permanently occupied by Roman garrisons, and its rulers were Roman protégés. There was no question of any political independence. For that, see Svazian 1989a: 54; Muradian 1990: 150.
 63. In fact, Griboedov had nothing to do with this document. See Muradian 1990: 144.
 64. For Velichko's activities, see Suny 1981: 131-132; Muradian 1990: 103.
 65. This was noted by another reviewer of the Neimatova's book. See Bol'shakov 1985.
 66. Also cf. Akhundov 1986: 247 for the Azeri view, and Ulubabian 1988: 87 for the Armenian view.
 67. They are well represented in Suren Aivazian's book. See Aivazian 1997.
 68. Since the very late 1990s, the fact of the Armenian genocide in 1915 has received an international recognition. First, the Belgian Senate passed an Armenian genocide resolution in 1998, and in January 2001, the French parliament followed. Then, in April the New York Life Insurance Co. agreed to pay compensation to heirs of the victims. In response, Turkish Islamic activists accused France of genocide carried on during the Algeria's war of independence, and Turkey cancelled an array of contracts with French firms.

Part II The Georgian-Abkhazian Conflict

1. For different interpretations of their intentions, see Menteshashvili 1990: 7-10; Lakoba 2001a.
2. For him see Basaria 1984: 3-24. For the Congress, see Clogg 1995: 181.
3. Abkhazia was represented in the Union of the North Caucasian Mountain Dwellers by the "minister plenipotentiary of the Abkhazian affairs", S. M. Ashkhatsava.
4. For details of this document, see Lakoba 1993: 294-296; 2001a.
5. Even contemporary Georgian authors, who are by no means sympathetic towards the Abkhazians, acknowledge that the Georgian Men'sheviks ignored the national authenticity of the Abkhazians. See Gamakharia, Gogia 1997: 68.
6. This event is interpreted quite differently by Georgian historians, who related the changes within the APS to the planned reorganization, intended to make its composition accord with the ethnic composition of the Abkhazian population. See Gamakharia, Gogia 1997: 83-84.
7. For the Georgian and Abkhazian versions of these events, see Menteshashvili 1990: 11-19; Gamakharia, Gogia 1997: 84; Lakoba 1990a: 64-69. Also see Hewitt 1993: 278-281.
8. The Georgian Church had made great efforts to be active in Abkhazia in earlier times as well, however. For that, see Marykhuba 1994b: 21.
9. Zviad Gamsakhurdia and other Georgian politicians argued in the early 1990s that the rights of ethnic minorities were not violated in the Democratic Republic of Georgia, and that that was rather the result of the establishment of three autonomous bodies in Georgia after 1921. For example, see Akhalkatsi, Alashvili 1991; Khoshtaria-Brosse 1991a.
10. For KGB documents testifying to the deliberate resettlement of the Mingrelians in Abkhazia and to the policy of Georgianization of the Abkhazians, as well as Abkhazian resistance to it, see Clogg 1995.
11. S. Ashkhatsava had already been arrested in 1937, with another group of Abkhazian intellectuals, including his critics, Z. Agrba and A. Khashba. See Clogg 1995: 181, 183, 186.
12. As late as 1989, Gamsakhurdia still denied this fact. For that, see Marykhuba 1994b: 51-53.
13. During recent years, some Georgian authors have begun to acknowledge ethnocide in Abkhazia during the period in question. For example, see Nodia 1998: 23.
14. Sh. D. Inal-Ipa was the fourth participant of the movement, but his signature was absent for security reasons.
15. The figures referred to by L. V. Marshania are slightly different. See Marshania 1995: 188-190.
16. For him, see Delba 1937; Gulia 1962; Bgazhba, Zelinsky 1965; Inal-Ipa 1974.
17. Gulia was by no means fascinated by this task, and they knew this even at the KGB. See Clogg 1995: 185.
18. For Inal-Ipa's more critical remarks, see Inal-Ipa 1965: 16; 1976: 40-42. Also see Bgazhba, Zelinsky 1965: 66.
19. In fact, Herodotus reproduced the widespread classical belief that Egypt was connected with Colchis by a large river named Ocean. For that, see Braund 1994: 17-18.
20. He was already the head of the "Bzyb' Committee of the Society for Abkhazian Education" in 1913. In 1918, he was the Minister plenipotentiary of Abkhazian affairs at the Union of the North Caucasian Mountain-Dwellers. For that, see Bgazhba 1964: 312; Bgazhba, Zelinsky 1965: 56; Clogg 1995: 181.
21. In fact, the first churches were built in Abkhazia in the 4th – 6th centuries A.D. See Gulia 1925: 136 ff.; Fadeev 1934: 69; Inal-Ipa 1965: 113-114, 124.

22. For a criticism of the approach, see Inal-Ipa 1976: 39-40.
23. Later on, this formula was appreciated so much by Abkhazian historians that they could not stop citing it in their works. For example, see Ashkhatsava 1925: 22; Fadeev 1934: 85; Maryhuba 1993: 20-21.
24. Contemporary specialists confirm that Moschi, Macrones, Mossynoeci, Tibareni and Saspirens might be identified with proto-Georgian groups. See Diakonov 1968: 119-122; Redgate 1998: 51, 57-58.
25. For more careful criticism of the Dzhevakhishvili's non-Marxist views, see Melikishvili 1959: 9, 13; Melikishvili, Lordkipanidze 1989: 32.
26. According to recent discoveries, they were Indo-European in language. See Khazaradze 1978. Yet, Khazaradze is inclined to identify the Mushki with the Kartvelians. See Khazaradze 1984.
27. A study of the Samtavro graveyard dating from the end of the 2nd – early 1st Millennium B.C. has demonstrated that in those days the inhabitants of Kartli were similar in physical appearance to the Caucasian highlanders, and southern physical elements arrived there later on. See Melikishvili 1959: 118-119.
28. For the sympathy of the contemporary Georgian scholarship towards this approach, see Melikishvili 1986: 56. In fact, there are more reasons to identify the Tubal with Luwian-speakers, and the Mushki with the Phrygian-speakers. For that, see Diakonov 1968: 193-194.
29. Yet, the tendency to regard Abkhazian as a dialect of Georgian had already emerged in Georgian scholarship in the late 19th century. For example, this view was shared by D. Kipiani. For that, see Hewitt 1995a: 290, 309, note 5.
30. This conclusion is very much appreciated by the contemporary Abkhazians. For example, see Chirikba 1998: 38.
31. This interpretation was based on the archaeological pattern reconstructed by the archaeologist B. A. Kufin, who identified the Colchian culture with the Koban' one and related them to the "Iberian-Mingrelians". See Kufin 1949: 133-257, 312.
32. Later on, most archaeologists gave up the indiscriminate identification of the Koban' culture of the Central Caucasus with the Colchian culture. For that, see Anchabadze 1964: 83-84; Kozenkova 1996: 130-131.
33. This idea was obviously rooted in Marr's heritage. See Marr 1927a: 13-14.
34. Later on, in order to defend Dzhanashia's approach from reasonable criticism, Melikishvili explained that Dzhanashia was indicating linguistic relationships between the Georgians and the North Caucasians rather than any direct physical ancestors. See Melikishvili 1959: 14.
35. Other Georgian authors were more cautious; they identified the western zone with the Colchians and the eastern one with the Iberians. See Mikeladze 1969: 7.
36. M. P. Inadze followed the same line in her Candidate in History thesis, where she even pointed to the Georgian origin of the Apsilians and the Abasgoi. See Inadze 1953: 18.
37. The Georgian historical tradition still respects Dzhanashia greatly as a cult figure. Yet, other scholars sometimes treat him as the "falsifier of history" of the Beria era. For example, see Voronov 1995.
38. For plans about territorial expansion that were reflected by the concept in question, see Suny 1988: 284-285.
39. I am thankful to Arda Inal-Ipa for the information on Inal-Ipa's participation in this matter.
40. True, in 1937 Delba published a pamphlet for the 45th anniversary of the commencement of Gulia's literary and research activities, which glorified the classic of the Abkhazian

literature.

41. Yet, in this respect Ingoroqva was not alone among Georgian historians of the early 1950s. For example, see Inadze 1953.
42. It is a pity that Western scholars sometimes reproduce this idea. For example, see Wixman 1982: 152.
43. For a criticism of Ingoroqva's methodology, see Inal-Ipa 1992: 7-8; Hewitt 1993: 273-275, 1998: 118-119.
44. For the political connotations of Ingoroqva's ideas, see Lakoba, Shamba 1989; Chumalov 1995: 23-25, 84-85.
45. Dzhanashia had identified the western region with the Colchians, whom his Georgian followers viewed as Western Kartvelian tribes. For that, see Lordkipanidze 1979a: 37-38, note 11.
46. Melikishvili stuck to this approach all his life. See Melikishvili, Lordkipanidze 1989: 31-32, 180, 184.
47. Later on, he gave up this idea. See Melikishvili, Lordkipanidze 1989: 181.
48. Contemporary scholars view this matter quite differently. For example, see Redgate 1998: 5.
49. The Abkhazian ethnographer, Sh. D. Inal-Ipa, believed that the country of Diauekhi was populated by Hurrians. See Inal-Ipa 1976: 110.
50. It is worth noting that the contemporary Laz, who live in Turkey, feel that they have no special relationships with the Mingrelians. They are more inclined to associate themselves with Turkey and Islam. The same was discovered by D. Bakradze in the case of the Ajars, who also identified themselves with Islam and the "Tatars" and were rapidly shifting to Turkish. See Bakradze 1878: 45-46, 76-77; Hann 1997, 2000; Hann, Beller-Hann 1998: 258.
51. Melikishvili's approach is sometimes shared by Western authors. For example, see Redgate 1998: 57; Goldenberg 1994: 13, where the "Kashki" are identified with the Georgians.
52. For the Armenian view, see Manandian 1956; Yeremian 1970; Karagezian 1981. For relationships between the early Mushki and Armenians, see Diakonov 1983: 169-170; Redgate 1998: 16-17.
53. This idea proved to hold firm in Georgian historiography. For example, see Mikeladze 1974: 191.
54. The archaeological excavations in Mtskheta were considered so important that they were patronized by the CC CPG and the Soviet of Ministers of the Georgian SSR starting in 1974. For a recent overview of all these discoveries, see Lordkipanidze 1982: 24-26; Braund 1994: 206-208.
55. In fact, first, the Greek alphabet was even more popular there in the period in question, and secondly, "Armazean writing" was discovered in Armenia as well, where Mesrob Mashtots came from. See Braund 1994: 212-215.
56. Much earlier, D. Bakradze also assumed that the Georgian alphabet had pre-Christian roots. See Bakradze 1878: VII.
57. In fact, as we will see further on, this occurred only in the 10th century.
58. For criticism of this approach by Abkhazian scholars, see Inal-Ipa 1992: 9-10; Marykhuba 1994a: 210-211.
59. Later on, Georgian authors represented Qulhai as the first Georgian Kingdom in the east Black Sea region. For example, see Lordkipanidze 1979a: 48-50.
60. Later on, this view was enthusiastically developed by other Georgian authors. For example, see Beradze 1989: 34.

61. For a criticism of this approach, see Lordkipanidze 1979a: 68, note 117; Braund 1994: 90-91.
62. For criticism of this approach, see Novosel'tsev 1985: 88; Boltunova 1979a; Yailenko 1982: 247-258; Lakoba 1993: 36-37; Tsetskhladze 1997, 1998; Braund 1994: 87-89, 91-92; Kohl, Tsetskhladze 1995: 164-168.
63. Yet, even some Georgian scholars recognized that Lordkipanidze went too far in arguing this. For example, see Inadze 1968: 144-145.
64. For a criticism of this approach, see Tsetskhladze 1997: 105-106.
65. Earlier, Kuftin wrote of a representation of the local Mother Goddess on the "colchidki". See Kuftin 1949: 255. Yet, this image was a common feature of the Near Eastern and Mediterranean worlds. See Tsetskhladze 1997: 104.
66. For an overview, see Braund 1994: 96-121; Tsetskhladze 1997, 1998.
67. The same concept was represented in the first Abkhazian school textbook in local history. See Dzidzaria 1960: 12-19, 34-35.
68. In fact, initially the Misimianoi might be identified with the Svans. See Tsulaia 1995: 20-21.
69. For the Tsebel'da culture, see also Pachulia 1968: 50-51; 1976: 118-120.
70. Besides, Inal-Ipa found Abkhazian place names in the northwest Caucasus up as far as Tuapse. See Inal-Ipa 1976: 383.
71. It is worth noting that he was more cautious in earlier times, when he assumed that the Abkhazian-Adyghe and west Georgian peoples were able to form in the same sub-stratum. See, for example, Inal-Ipa 1964: 4.
72. As we already know, Armenian scholars identified the Hayasa population with the Armenian ancestors.
73. It is worth noting that, by contrast, Anchabadze permanently ignored Turchaninov's view.
74. At the same time, Inal-Ipa's use of place names was sometimes incorrect. This was pointed out by his Georgian opponents. For example, see Lomouri 1990: 171-172.
75. Only in the very late 1980s, did Inal-Ipa venture to write of what was impossible to mention in the 1960s - 1970s. He discussed the "Abkhazian school of Christian architecture", the great impact of Abkhazian upon the Georgian language, etc. See Inal-Ipa 1989b; Inal-Ipa, Amichba 1989.
76. It is worth noting that Ardzinba's last name means "gold-worker" in Abkhazian. Apparently, he was born to a prestigious lineage of Abkhazian smiths.
77. There is one more, in this case an Afrocentric, hypothesis of Colchian origins, which, following Herodotus, claimed that they were Black Africans. See Ali, Ali 1993: 19; Martin 1993: 63. Characteristically, while sharing the Georgian concept of "dual aboriginality", S. Chervonnaya cannot but acknowledge the Abkhazian indigenus status. See Chervonnaya 1994: 9-21.
78. For arguments in favor of the Abkhazian approach, see Hewitt 1993: 272.
79. In fact, Yenukidze had just reproduced the resolution of the CC CPG, passed in April 1979. See Marykhuba 1994a: 281, 284. Quite recently, R. Chabukiani (1995: 29) reproduced the same reasoning.
80. He returned to this argument many times while appearing in the Georgian media. For example, see Muskhelishvili 1990: 18, 1991.
81. For racism in contemporary Georgia, see Charachidze 1989: 13; Hewitt 1993: 300, 320, note 83.
82. For censorship and the impact of Party officials upon the Georgian media, see Chkheidze 1989.

83. For the secret protocol of this meeting, see Marykhuba 1994a: 298-330.
84. For that incident, see Marykhuba 1994a: 168, 189-205.
85. For that, see Hewitt 1996: 210.
86. This entirely contradicted contemporary academic views. For the latter, see Shnirelman 1989b.
87. The historian, Akaki Bakradze, a professor at Tbilisi University, was persecuted in the very late 1970s, when he was accused of fostering propaganda for Georgian nationalism. Between March 1989 and May 1990, he was the head of the All-Georgian Shota Rustaveli Society. See Goldenberg 1994: 92, 95.
88. For Voronov's response, see Voronov 1990. For Inal-Ipa's criticism of Mibchuan's view, see Inal-Ipa 1992: 20-21.
89. For the fate of Mingrelian, see Hewitt 1995a. Interestingly, recently S. Chervonnaya reproduced an idea of the Iberian-Caucasian language family as a well-established theory. See Chervonnaya 1994: 9-10.
90. Thus, it is difficult to agree with K. Dzebisashvili that the Georgian mass media were loyal to the Abkhazians until 1992. See Dzebisashvili 2000: 153. It is also worth noting that, while referring to a hot Georgian-Abkhazian historiographic dispute and sharing Georgian views of the past, Chervonnaya mentioned Georgian chauvinist propaganda only in passing. See Chervonnaya 1994: 55-56.
91. For the events of 1989, see *Istinu upriatat' nel'sia* 1989.
92. For other examples of this kind of propaganda that involved many Georgian intellectuals, and for the Abkhazian response, see Tsvinaria 1989; Chalidze 1991; Kvarchia, Achugba 1991: 141; Inal-Ipa 1989b, 1992: 27; Hewitt 1998: 120, 123.
93. It is worth noting that, while discussing geographical issues of classical Colchis thirty years earlier, Lomouri avoided addressing hot ethnic problems. See Lomouri 1957.
94. This was reported by a Moscow journalist who visited Abkhazia in the beginning of 1991. See Arseniev 1991.
95. One should appreciate that she had defended these ideas persistently from the 1960s – 1970s. For that, see Marykhuba 1994a: 200.
96. For a criticism of this approach, see Hewitt 1998: 122. See also Shnirelman 1998a: 55.
97. For a criticism of this approach from the philological point, see Inal-Ipa 1992: 108, note 50; Hewitt 1998: 121. For an indignant response by a certain Abkhazian scholar, see Ashkharua 1993.
98. It is worth noting that the author was a retired major-general in the KGB.
99. In fact, quite the opposite was the case, as it is acknowledged even by Gamakharia and Gogia, who share the Georgiocentric stance. See Gamakharia, Gogia 1997: 49-50.
100. It is no accident that, at that time, the Abkhazians accused him of being incompetent in the Abkhazian language. See Marykhuba 1994a: 176.
101. Even earlier, Marshania attempted to ease the escalating Georgian-Abkhazian conflict. He warned the Georgian authorities to avoid intervention in Abkhazian affairs, and in this respect, his position was different from the Georgian one from the very beginning. See Marshania 1990.
102. One of the authors of the volume, an assistant professor in the Department of Political Science and History of Georgia at the Georgian Institute of Agriculture, D. Gamakharia, took part in the dissemination of Ingoroqva-type viewpoint as early as 1991. See Gamakharia, Chania 1991a. It is also worth noting that he was a Gamsakhurdia follower and a member of the Georgian faction in the Abkhazian parliament between December 1991 and August 1992.

103. This author reproduced Turchaninov's hypothesis about the relationship between the Maikop Stone and the Byblos writing system, although he skipped references to either Turchaninov or the connections with the Abkhazian language. Apparently, being a professional linguist, he was aware of the highly doubtful nature of Turchaninov's ideas.
104. Yet, one Abkhazian author insists that initially they used Abkhazian in the liturgy in Abkhazian Churches. See Smyr 1994: 8.
105. Indeed, initially the Abkhazian Kingdom was established as a sovereign power by the Abkhazian Princes, but later their independence was restricted by the newly created Georgian state. For an illuminating discussion, see Tsulaia 1995: 30-41.
106. For the "genocide of the Abkhazian people" over the last hundred years, see also Shamba 1990.
107. For the importance of the origin of iron production in the context of the Georgian-Abkhazian discourse of the past, see Shnirelman 1998a: 53-54.
108. This was an exaggeration, for the relationships between the Greeks and the local inhabitants in northern Colchis were by no means peaceful. Only the Dioscurias region was greatly affected by Hellenization, whereas the highlands were beyond the sphere of Greek influence. See Tsatskhladze 1997: 108, 1998: 93.
109. In his scholarly papers Lakoba is more careful with respect to remote language relationships. See Lakoba 2000: 17.
110. For details of the development of writing systems in the territory of Abkhazia, see Bgazhba 1967: 6-25.
111. For the anti-Muslim stance of the well-known Georgian writer, Ch. Amiredzhibi, see Temishev 1990. Later on, he claimed that the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict lacked any religious connotations, yet kept linking the Abkhazians with Jordan and Saudi Arabia. See Amiredzhibi 1992.
112. The term "Samurzaqano tribe" was first used at the time of Nicholas I. See Basaria 1923: 99.
113. Meanwhile, the situation looked different in the late 19th century. At that time, the Russian authorities made a clear distinction between the Samurzaqano people and the Mingrelians, whereas it proved more difficult for them to distinguish between the Samurzakano people and the Abkhazians. See Muller 1998: 224.
114. Intentional ignorance of this census by Georgian demographers is clear to any independent researcher. For example, see Muller 1998: 225.
115. Also, the Russians had no ambitions to view themselves as indigenous people in Abkhazia.
116. The historian, Stanislav Lakoba, took part in the development of this symbolism.
117. The Abkhazian historian recently confirmed this. See Lakoba 2000: 18.

Part III Thrown over the Ridge

1. For the establishment of the SOAR in detail, see Shengelaia 1991: 45-73; Toidze 1994.
2. True, Chochiev himself maintained that the letter was written by Z. Tskhovrebov. See Chochiev n.d.: 22, 27.
3. An English expert shares this view as well. See Birch 1996: 170.
4. They claimed this despite the fact that there were twice as many Jews and Armenians combined than there were Georgians in Tskhinvali in 1886.
5. It is worth noting that the contemporary Ossetians are turning away from Vaneev's beliefs. As was demonstrated by a sociological survey among Vladikavkaz bilingual school children, who proved to be equally fluent in both Russian and Ossetian, they manifested

their ethnicity with reference to norms of behavior, ethnic festivals and rituals rather than to language loyalty. See Kibizova 1994.

6. For the political struggle around the Koban' culture, see Shnirelman 1996b.
7. A more plausible hypothesis identifies the KAC with the Dvals. See Kuznetsov 1992: 184.
8. In fact, whereas there are good reasons to identify it with the Hurrians, evidence in favor of the Kartvelians is lacking.
9. Chochiev discovers the associations with Ossetian folklore there, no less successfully. See Chochiev 1996.
10. The leading specialist in Alan archaeology considers this to be a powerful argument, which, together with some other archaeological data, provides a strong basis for the idea of the Alans-Ossetians' arrival in the Bolshaja Liakhvi River Basin as early as the 5th – 6th centuries. See Kuznetsov 1989, 1992: 177, 180-183.
11. For these threats by President Gamsakhurdia, see Cheremin 1991; Birch 1996: 166.
12. Being familiar with Chochiev, it is not easy to judge what is more characteristic – sincere pride in the ancestors or open mockery. Indeed, in the same pamphlet, Chochiev said: “Do not believe myths of a chosen people”, and, at the same time, did his best to construct the “all-Ossetian idea”. See Chochiev n.d.: 23, 71 ff..
13. For dramatic events linked with this invention, see Chochiev n.d.: 29-30.
14. This is a common strategy of ethnic minorities claiming the upgrading of their political status. See Horowitz 1985: 33.

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