

The Valid and Non-valid Application of Etymology to History

by B.G. Hewitt

Although the search for a word's earliest recoverable meaning and the ascription of the etymon to the appropriate source-language can often be an exceptionally demanding task, it is surprising how many people think that they are equipped to try their hand at etymologising by virtue simply of knowing the relevant language(s). The frequently resulting folk-etymologies can be amusing, if simplistic. For example, take the Georgian toponym **Yardzia**, which is the site of a famous complex of caves near the Georgian-Turkish border. Myth has it that the famous Queen Tamar (1184-1213) was once out hunting with an uncle when she got lost in these caves. Searching for her, the uncle heard her cry:

aka	var,	dzia (diminutive of bidza)
here	I-am	uncle!

The shortened form **var+dzia** was then assumed to have given rise to the toponym!

The mention of toponyms raises an obvious and direct link between etymology and history. Despite the movement and resettlement of peoples, place-names (of settlements, towns, rivers, etc...) are especially resistant to change (Bynon 1977.273-278), so that, to take the famous example, although Celtic-speakers are now confined to fringes of the British Isles (including Ireland), the etymology of toponyms reveals that their ancestors must once have been spread not only over the whole of these islands but also over much of the mainland of Europe, being the **Keltoi**, northern neighbours to the Ancient Greeks, and the **Galli**-residents of Julius Caesar's Gaul. And so a purely philological exercise, entirely unbiased in intent, produces a hypothesis which can be tested against the evidence of either documented history or archæology.

When it comes to ethnonyms, *επιχθόνιοι* would perhaps suppose that a people's self-designation would always be derived from the lexical stock of that people's language and thus etymologisable, if at all, only in terms of that language. This, however, is not always so. The Turkic origin of the ethnonym **Bulgar(ian)** is a case in point. In the Caucasus the self-designation of the Georgians is **kartvel-i** (plural **kartvel-eb-i**), which the grand old man of Georgian philology, Ak'ak'i Shanidze (1887-1987), dared to suggest was an adaptation of the proper designation of the Iranian Parthians (**kart-v-el-i** ← **part-v-el-i** ← **part-av-el-i**), which in its adapted form came to replace whatever earlier ethnonym had existed (1978). Such toponyms as the English **Georgia** with its ethnonym **Georgian** (Russian **Gruzija/Gruziny**, Turkish **Gürcüstan/Gürcüler**) are believed to be derived from the Persian adaptation of the Armenian complex **vr-**, as in the phrase **i Vr-ac** 'amongst the Georgians'. Despite the veneration in which he was generally held, Shanidze was not exactly praised for propounding his theory, for it seemed to a proud people that to suggest a foreign provenance for their self-designation was somehow to cast aspersions on their national identity. In this case, then, an unassuming piece of philology met with an unfavourable reaction for wholly non-philological reasons.

The problem I really wish to address, however, is the unacceptability of a linguist deliberately setting out with the intention of manufacturing an etymology in order to create, or at least support, a past which a (group of) people might find politically convenient at some point in their nation's history. The north-western area of Georgia is the homeland of the North West Caucasian people we call Abkhazians. As part of the long-standing conflict between the Abkhazians and their Kartvelian (viz. Georgian, Mingrelian, Svan and Laz) neighbours various attempts have been made by both historians and linguists on the Kartvelian side to prove either that today's (North West Caucasian) Abkhazians replaced about 3-5 centuries ago some earlier (Kartvelian) Abkhazians and thus have no historical rights over this territory, or that Abkhazia has two aboriginal peoples, namely the North West Caucasian Abkhazians and the Kartvelians. The former theory is particularly associated with the late P'avle Ingoroq'va and has recently been re-proposed by the Svan linguist Aleksandre Oniani (for a critique see Hewitt Forthcoming). The latter notion is being actively proposed by the historian Mariam Lortkipanidze (for a critique see Voronov Forthcoming). Now, however, a sort of amalgam of these two theories has been crafted by none other than Tamaz Gamq'relidze, director of the Oriental Institute in Tbilisi, member of both the Georgian and Soviet Academies of Sciences, and honorary member of both the British and American Academies. The full version of the article appeared in the Georgian journal **macne** 'Reporter' (Historical Series 2, 1991, 7-16). A shortened version was published in one of the Georgian newspapers, where it was stated that the full article should be made available in both Russia and abroad. A Russian translation has now duly appeared in the internationally respected Moscow journal **Yoprosty Jazykoznanija** 'Questions of Linguistics', whose editor is Tamaz Gamq'relidze! There follows my English translation from the Georgian original. It is my intention to highlight the tendentious nature of the author's argumentation by presenting the whole article as a kind of paradigm-case of how NOT to approach and carry out etymology, and so I have not given full bibliographical details of the works cited in the article; the only other adaptation is my addition of paragraph-numbers to facilitate cross-referencing between translation and my subsequent comments. The translation is followed by my detailed commentary, which, I hope, speaks for itself.

Academician Tamaz Gamq'relidze

On the History of the Tribal Names of Ancient Colchis

(On the historical-etymological relation of the ethnonyms «Apxaz-/Abazg-» and «Abaza/Apswa»)

[1] As is well-known, in ancient sources of the 1st-IIInd centuries A.D. the «Apsilians» (Greek Ἀψιλλαι) and «Abazgians» (Greek Ἀβαζγοῦ) and the

countries «Apsilia» (Greek Ἀψιλια) and «Abazgia» (Greek Ἀβαογια)¹ are mentioned as being neighbours on the shore of Western Georgia.

[2] Corresponding to the names «Apsilia» and «Abazgia» of the Greek sources in mediæval Georgian sources (*kartlis tskhovreba*) are «apšileti» and «apxazeti»².

[3] For a long time there has been a fierce debate in the scholarly literature over the question of the ethnic identity of the peoples referred to by these ethnonyms in the historical sources.

[4] A portion of the researchers judge them to be Kartvelian tribes; others deem the tribes referred to by these names to be of Abkhaz-Adyghean origin³.

[5] We shall here touch upon only the origin and etymological relationships of these ethnonyms.

[6] Insofar as the «Apsilians» and «Abazgians» are mentioned in the ancient sources alongside each other, naturally they must represent different ethno-linguistic entities. We can link the ethnonym «Apsilian» and the name «Apsilia» (Georgian «apšileti») with the Abkhazians' modern self-designation «Apswa» and conclude them to be identical historically⁴.

[7] But what in this case is the meaning of the ethnonym «Abazgians» and the toponym «Abazgia», which differ from the above, which are attested in Greek, and to which the mediæval Georgian terms «apxazebi» and «apxazeti» correspond?

[8] If in the ethnonym «Apsil-/Apšilians» we suppose the ancestors of, or closely related tribes to, today's «Apswa/Abkhazians»⁵, the same cannot be said

¹In Arrian we read: «The Abaskians are neighbours of the Apsilians». In the parallel passage of the text of «The Voyage» by an unknown author of the Vth century the name Ἀβαοκοι is rendered by the form Ἀβαογοι, which is the more widespread variant of the relevant ethnonym. The «Apsilians» are the tribe living on the N.E. coast of the Pontus, above the «Laz»; the «Abazgians», neighbours to the «Apsilians», are removed from the sea and live in the country's interior.

²«apšileti» and «apxazeti» are mentioned in Dzhuansher in the 30s of the VIIIth century in connection with the raid on Western Georgia by Murvan the Deaf (vid. *kartlis tskhovreba* vol.I, p.235, and Mariam Lortkipanidze *Abkhazia and the Abkhazians* 1990, pp.8-9).

³Vid. works by P. Ingoroq'va, G. Melikishvili, Z.V. Anchabadze, Sh. Inal-Ipa, M. Inadze.

⁴We can regard the form «Apsil-» as a name derived from the root *aps-* plus the (Kartvelian?) suffix *-il-*; the Old Georgian sibilant variant «apšil-», in contradistinction to the sibilant form «apsil-» confirmed in Greek, can easily be explained by dialectal variation between the sibilant and sibilant-sibilant forms of the fricative phoneme in the source-root **aps-*, which variation is characteristic even for the modern Abkhaz dialects.

⁵Containing this same *aps-* root and thus historically connected with today's «Apswa» must also be the name «Apsaros» (Greek Ἀψαροσ), which designates a town-fortress to the south-west of the river «Batisi». Significant in this regard is the information from the *kartlis tskhovreba* chronicle of Zhamtaaghmc'ereli: «Giorgi Laša, which is translated as 'enlightener of the world' in the language of the Apsars» (cf. Abkhaz *ḡ-ḡḡḡ-ḡḡ* 'light, bright'). This addition «in the language of the Apsars» is represented in manuscripts of the XVIIIth century, which must testify to the fact that the name «Apsar-» was still in use at this time in the Georgian-speaking world to designate the modern-day Apswa-Abkhazians (cf. Lortkipanidze 1990 29-30).

of the terms «Abazgians/apxazebi» from Greek-Georgian sources, which thus must represent an ethno-linguistic entity different from the «Apswa/Apšilian».

[9] Consequently, the ethnonym «Abazg-/apxaz-» attested in Greek-Georgian historical sources first signified not the later «Apswa/Abkhazians», who historically and etymologically are linked rather to the «Apsil-/Apšilian» tribe attested in these same sources, but representatives of some different ethnos. This is confirmed by an etymological analysis of the ethnonym «Abazg-/apxaz-» itself.

[10] Since the Georgian form «apxaz-» is later from the point of view of textual attestation than the Greek form «Ἀβαζγ-/Abazg-», some hypothesise that the Georgian form «apxaz-» derives from the Greek «Abazg-» or similar form as a result of an appropriate phonetic transformation. In this Greek form «Abazg-» itself is seen a similarity to the ethnonym «Abaza», which designates the Abazinians, who live in the northern Caucasus and who are closely related to today's Abkhazians: «Abaza» is a generic term for Abkhazians-Abazinians.

[11] All this confirmed, as it were, the Abkhazo-Adyghean nature in terms of origin of this «Abazg-/Ἀβαζγ-» form attested in Greek⁶. This would lead to the Abkhazo-Adyghean origin and nature of the very form «apxaz-» existing in Georgian.

[12] But nowhere does there appear any etymological link between the ethnonyms «Abaza» and Greek «Abazg-»; they must represent forms which are historically independent from each other. From these the Greek form «Abazg-» is the historical equivalent of the ethnonym «apxaz-» attested in Georgian⁷, whereas the name «Abaza» conveys an entirely different meaning and belongs to the North Caucasian, Cherkess-Adyghean linguistic world.

[13] How, then, are we to understand the historical relation between the actual forms «apxaz-» in Georgian and «Abazg-» in Greek?

[14] From the point of view of which came first historically and etymologically speaking the chronology of the attestation of forms has no significance. And so the Greek form «Abazg-» cannot simply be regarded as the source of the Georgian form «apxaz-» for the transformation of the form «Abazg-» attested in Greek into the Georgian form «apxaz-» would be uninterpretable; that is to say, we have no grounds, either formal or semantic, for believing that the title of the ethnos called «Abazgians» by the Greeks would have been transformed in Georgian (and a range of oriental languages -- Arabic, Persian, Armenian) into the shape «apxaz-», since the means were there in Georgian and the other oriental languages phonetically to represent the title of this ethnos in exactly

⁶On the grounds of similarity with «Abaza» the form «Abazg-» attested in Greek was divided into the elements **abaz-g-*; where *-g-* was interpreted as suffix of derivation *-x-* attached to the root *Abaz-*: **Abaz-g-* = **Abaz-x-*.

⁷As equivalents to the Greek ethnonym «Abazg-» in different mediæval oriental sources (Arabic, Persian, Armenian) we find without exception similar forms which correspond to the Georgian ethnonym «apxaz-» (*Abrazz/Abrazz/Aprazz*) (cf. **Encyclopædia Iranica** I.2.222-224).

the same way as happened in Greek, i.e. by means of «Abazg-/Abazγ-» or some similar form⁸.

[15] The situation will be altogether different if we allow the historical priority of the form attested in Georgian (and other oriental languages) over the Greek form: Greek «Ἀβαζγ-/Abazg-» derives from the form «apxaz-/abxaz» attested in Georgian (and other oriental languages) and represents a phonetic variant of it: *apxaz-/abxaz* => Greek Ἀβαζγ- («Abazg-/Abazγ-»).

[16] The consonant-complex *ɣx-/ɣx-* is, of course, foreign to Greek, and it is replaced by the final sequence *-zɣ-/zɣ-*; which is permitted by the language, by shifting the consonant *-x-* in the source-ethnonym «apxaz-/abxaz» to the end and by the natural voicing of the whole word: *apxaz- // abxaz* => Greek *Abazγ- // Abazγ-* (in written form: Ἀβαζγ-)⁹.

[17] When the Greeks were becoming acquainted with the tribes living in ancient Colchis and their self-designations, they would transform these names in a way that was natural to their language, as a consequence of which new variants of these self-designations were created which were natural to Greek.

[18] In particular, the self-designation «apxaz-/abxaz» of one of the tribes residing in ancient Colchis was naturally transformed in the speech of the Greeks into the shape «Abazg-/Abazγ-» in accordance with Greek phonetic norms¹⁰.

[19] The correctness of this view is borne out particularly by the circumstance that in no mediæval tradition is the ethnonym «apxaz-» represented by the form «Abazg-»; we have only «apxaz», «apxaz» and like forms, which correlate with the form «apxaz-» of Georgian mediæval sources. In its own right, the Arabic-Persian form «Abxaz» in contrast to the Georgian form «apxaz-» -- i.e. *ɣ* instead of consonant *ɣ* -- can be explained by the non-existence in Arabic of the consonant [ɣ] and corresponding grapheme.

⁸Neither can we reckon the Georgian form *apxaz-* to have been acquired from the form *Abazγ-* attested in Greek as the result of an alternation of the type *ɣartɣ²-ivs ɣyart²-i*; since in the case of the relevant alternation here we are dealing with the mutual alternation of *harmonik* complexes in modern Georgian, which cannot be hypothesised for the complex *-zɣ-/zɣ-* when contrasting the forms *Abazγ-/apxaz-* (for a discussion of the relevant alternation in harmonic complexes within the modern Georgian dialects see T. Gamq'elidze & G. Mač'avariani **The System of Sonants and Ablaut in the Kartvelian Languages** 304).

⁹The process of «Hellenizing» this ethnonym is taken even further in the form *Abaxk-* (Greek Ἀβακκοι -- in Arrian), where the complex *-xk-*; more natural for Greek, appears in place of the less widespread complex *-zɣ-/zɣ-/zɣ-* represented in the form Ἀβαζγου (for the complex *-zɣ-/zɣ-* in Greek cf. such forms as *δυογενεῖα*, *ὑογινον* etc.).

¹⁰Examples of analogical phonetic transformations can be found time and again in different languages at the time of the transmission of borrowed names. So, for example, as equivalent to the Georgian toponym «*ṗilisi*» we get the Arabic-Persian-Turkish forms *Tāfilia/Tiflisa* because of the unacceptability in these languages of two consonants in initial position (the initial complex is overcome by the insertion of a vowel between them); cf. also *Tiblisī, Tiblīs* etc. in Russian formations.

[20] This once more underlines the priority of the form «apxaz-/Abxaz» containing the complex *-pxz-/-dx-* attested in Georgian and a range of oriental languages in comparison with the form «Abazg-», which was characteristic only of the Greek tradition; it represented exclusively the Greek way of conveying this ethnonym and thus can have had nothing in common with the term «Abaza». Accepting this explains many ethno-etymological difficulties which are tied up with these terms and their historical interpretation.

[21] It is not the Greek «Αβαζ-/Abazg-» form (and, thus, not the ethnonym «apxaz-/Abxaz») which must be connected etymologically with this ethnonym «Abaza» but rather the self-designation «Apswa» of today's Abkhazians, which is perfectly natural from a historical-genetic point of view.

[22] The intensively stressed form **Ábaza** of the name «Abaza» must have given the vowel-reduced form ***Ábza**¹¹, which gave us the historically attested root *Αρξα-* as a result of devoicing the consonant-complex *-dz-* to *-px*¹²: **Ápsa-wa** => **Ápswa**¹³.

[23] Thus, the «Apsil-/Apšilians» of the Greek-Georgian sources, it would seem, are an ethnos related genetically and linguistically to today's «Apswa-Abkhazians», possibly their ancestors, whereas the ancient «Abazg-/Abkhazians» originally represented some different ethnos from these, but their designation in the course of time and as a result of certain semantic alterations was finally transferred in the Georgian-speaking world to precisely the «Apswa-Abkhazians», these being one of the indigenous ethnic groupings of historical Western Georgia.

¹¹ Works by K. Lomtadze and N. Arshba deal with the reduction of the a-vowel in Abkhaz under the influence of intensive mobile stress.

For analogical phonetic phenomena cf. Abaza **ánaša** => **ánša** 'uncle', **ánax^oa** => **ánx^oa** '(wife's) mother-in-law', Abkhaz ***ášax^oa** => **ášx^oa** 'foot' and many others.

The reduced vowel variant «Abza/Abz-» of «Abaza» can be seen in the ethnonym «Abzoe», which is brought in by Pliny in his **Natural History** as the name of «numerically large tribes» living in the North Caucasus between the Azov and Caspian Seas. We can achieve such an identification if we impose a certain geographical emendation upon the testimony of Pliny from the point of view of the historical localisation of these tribes (cf. Imnadze).

There may be yet another name connected historically with the root «Abaza» in the Abkhaz-Adyghean world, namely the forms «Abadzex/Abdzex», which designate a people living compactly today in the North Caucasus (the Adyghe Autonomous Region).

Linked with the full-vowel variant of the form «Abaza» must also be *Abaz/Abazy* attested in Russian written sources of the XII-XVIth centuries.

¹² For an analogical case of the devoicing of a complex cf. Abkhaz ***ah^oazba** => **ah^ozba** 'knife', which in T'ap'anta Abaza is **áh^oaspa**: in T'ap'anta the voiceless variant *-sp-* corresponds to the complex *-zš-*.

¹³ The change *Αρξα-ωα* => *Αρξ-ωα* through the loss of post-accentual a-vowel is again explained by the influence of intensive stress. The root-final *-a* re-appears in plural forms: *Αρξ-ωα* 'Abkhazian' vs *Αρξα-ι^oα*, *Αρξα-ι^oα* 'Abkhazians'.

[24] But as indicator of which ethnos must this very ethnonym «apxaz-/Abazg-» have been in origin? Which tribes of ancient Colchis must we suppose to be indicated from a historical-genetic point of view beneath this designation?

[25] The ethno-cultural state of the Black Sea coast in the first centuries of our era guides us to the possibility of seeing in «apxaz-/Abazgians» tribes of precisely a Western Georgian origin who must have been close relatives of the Svan and Mingrelo-Laz tribes resident in ancient Colchis¹⁴.

[26] The basic population of ancient Colchis at this time was represented by just these West-Kartvelian tribes, who spoke western dialects of the Kartvelian language (the living descendants of these dialects are Svan and Mingrelo-Laz). This is borne out by the entry into the language of the Greek «Argonauts» of several West-Kartvelian words, which later took root in the ancient Greek language¹⁵. Amongst these West-Kartvelian dialects and tribes it seems that we must suppose for this period in addition to the Svans and Mingrelo-Laz those tribes also which in the Greek-Georgian historical sources are referred to by the ethnonym «Abazg-/apxaz-».

[27] Neither can it be accidental that the «Abazg-/Abkhazians» are as a rule mentioned in the antique sources in the context of ethnonyms referring precisely to these Kartvelian tribes, i.e. alongside such tribes residing in ancient Colchis as the Laz (Λαζοι), Sans (Σαννοι, Τζαννοι), Sanigs (Σαννιγαι), Macrons (Μακρονες), Heniokhs (Ηνιοχοι) etc... (cf. for example the **Yoyage** of Arrian)¹⁶.

[28] A further consideration which would lead us to hypothesise a Kartvelian origin for the «Abazg-/Abkhazians» is that it is precisely they who become the unifiers of the other numerous Kartvelian tribes resident in ancient Colchis into a general West Georgian state.

[29] According to Greek historical sources it appears that the first heir of the ancient Colchians and Colchis is the Kingdom of «Lazika» («Egrisi» of the Georgian sources), from which «Abazgia» split off towards the end of the VIth

14 The oldest designation itself of these tribes «apxaz-», which was transformed in Greek speech into «Abazg-/Abazγ-», is from the point of view of its structure wholly «Kartvelian», containing the harmonic complex *-ax-* widespread in these languages (but not permitted for Greek) and beginning with the *a*-vowel (cf. in this regard the very old Georgian toponym «ač'ara», which is already attested in *kartlis tskhovrabia*)

15 Especially interesting from this point of view is the ancient Greek word κωΦας 'fleece', in Mycenaean Greek ko-wo 'skin', which must be an ancient Greek loan of the West-Kartvelian word *t'kov-/*t'q'ov-, Georgian t'q'av- 'skin'.

16 For the Kartvelian origin of the tribes referred to by these ethnonyms one can consult works by S. Džhanashia, G. Melikishvili, N. K'ech'aghmadze, M. Inadze, T. Q'aukhchishvili, and N. Lomouri.

All of the ethnonyms included above must reflect historically well-known Kartvelian tribes: Λαζοι are the Laz; we can identify the Sans and Sanigs with the Zans (cf. Svan mə-zän 'Mingrelian', zän 'Mingrelia') and with the Ch'ans, the Makrons with the Mingrelians (i.e. with the form *magral => margal-, which in the West-Kartvelian dialect meant 'native of Egrisi [Mingrelia]'), whereas the Heniokhs will be the Svans (an alternative view regards 'Heniokh' as the Svan translation of 'Ch'an' -- B. Gigineishvili).

century. This latter then unites the territories of the Sanigs, Missimians, Apsilians and others, and it is as a consequence of this that the sense of the term «Abazgia/apxazeti [Abkhazia]» is widened.

[30] The meaning of «apxazeti» is widened ever more at the end of the VIIIth century, when the unification of «apxazeti» and «Egrisi» occurred. From this time the name «Abkhazia» signifies the whole of Western Georgia, whilst the ethnonym «Abazg-/Abkhazian» becomes a concept parallel to the term «kartveli [Georgian]», meaning a native generally of «Western Georgia»¹⁷. It remains to be elucidated when and in what situation the re-narrowing of the concept «apxaz-» took place in the Georgian-speaking world, as a result of which it became applied to just one of the indigenous ethnic groupings of Western Georgia, in particular to the «Apswa-Abkhazians». Ethnology well knows of such examples of the widening-narrowing of the meaning of ethnonyms and of the transference-broadening of the name of one ethnos to another (cf. in this respect, for example, the history of the Turkish ethnonym «Bulgar-»¹⁸).

[31] On the basis of the above we can conclude as follows:

[32] The ethnonym «apxaz/Abxaz» attested in Georgian and oriental sources is the original form and must have been originally a tribal name of West-Kartvelian provenance after the pattern of the ethnonyms «Laz-», «San-», «Sanig-», «Makron-», «Heniokh-» etc...

[33] The form «Αβαζγ-/Abazg-» attested as its equivalent in Greek represents the result of the phonetic transformation of the primary form «apxaz-» created according to the Greek phonetic norms, so that there is no connection with what at a glance looks similar to it, namely «Abaza», which represents a generic title for today's Abkhaz-Abazinians.

[34] This very old form «Abaza» does itself provide the start of the self-designation «Apswa» of today's Abkhazians, which must represent the vowel-reduced form of «Abaza»: **Abaza** => **Abza** => **Ápsa**. This **Ápsa**-root underlies the modern Abkhazians' self-designation: **Ápsa-wa-** => **Ápswa**.

[35] The ethnonym «Apsa-» makes its appearance in a very early epoch in the guise of the forms «Aps-il-», «Apš-il-» and «Aps-ar-», which consequently we must judge to be names referring to Abkhaz-Adyghean tribes.

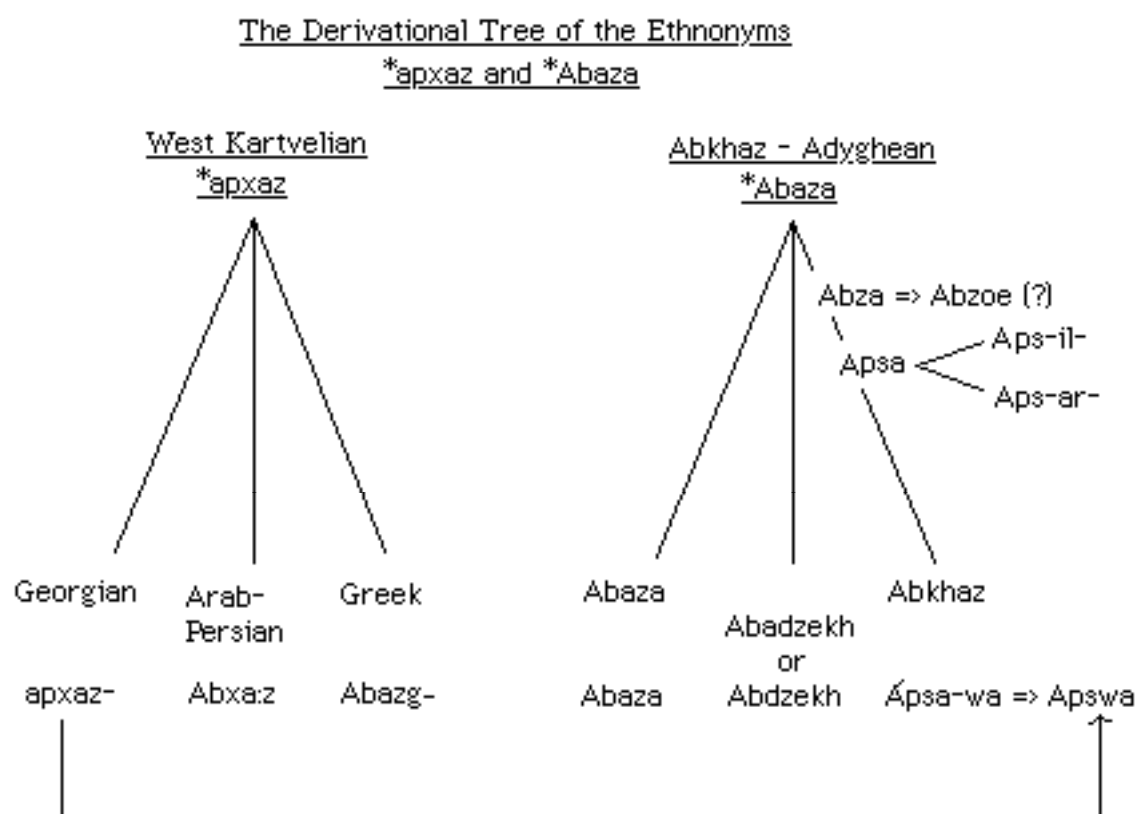
[36] The ethnonym «apxaz-» itself together with its Greek equivalent «Abazg-», referring in origin to a certain West-Kartvelian tribe, later comes to be used to signify the population of the whole of Western Georgia, and the term «apxazeti [Abkhazia]» becomes the title for the kingdom of the whole of Western Georgia.

[37] After the break up of the unified «Abkhazian Kingdom» there occurs a narrowing of the ethnonym «apxaz-» resulting in it being employed in the Georgian-speaking world exclusively to indicate that people who called themselves Apswa. It remains to be cleared up when the ethnonym «apxaz-»,

17 Cf. M. Lortkipanidze's booklet pp.9-10.

18 The name of the modern Bulgarians, who speak one of the Slavonic languages, comes from the Turkic-speaking Bulgarians who in the VIIth century moved into the Balkans and merged with the Slavs.

which earlier had been used in a much wider sense, became linked to the indigenous Apswa population of Georgia. Be that as it may, it is beyond doubt that the naming of the Apswa-Abkhazians as «apxazebi» took place precisely in the Georgian-speaking world, and it was from here that the term spread into other modern languages.



Comments

Paragraph [2] since Gamq'relidze (hereafter TG) is going to try to relate etymologically the ethno-toponymical root **Abazg-** in Greek with the Georgian root **apxaz-**, what better than to plant in the mind of the reader right from the outset the notion that the Greeks' **Abazgia** was synonymous with the **apxazeti** of mediæval Georgian sources, with a similar parallelism suggested between Greek **Apsilia** and mediæval Georgian **apšileti**? The mediæval Georgian chronicles have been published in 3 volumes by Simon Q'aukhchishvili (I in 1955, II in 1959, and IV [sic] in 1973). In 1,816 pages of text **apšileti** is mentioned precisely once (vol. I p.235 line 5), where Tskhumi [Sukhum] is described as 'a/the town of **apšileti**'; in the manuscript of Queen Anna the reading is 'a/the town of **apšileti** and **apxazeti**'. This single reference contrasts with frequent and numerous occurrences of the toponym **apxazeti**. Although the late (XVIIIth century) royal chronicler Yakhusht' Bat'onishvili (1696-1756) does state in his geographical treatise (which makes up the whole of volume IV) that the Greeks 'called it **Abasa**, whereas the Georgians called it **apxazeti**' (p.784 l.2), there can surely be no doubt that *in genera*/the sense of **apxazeti** in *kartlis*

tskhovraḡa is wider than what the Greeks meant by **Abazgia**. And so, the reader should resist this attempt to axiomatise a link which must stand or fall exclusively on the etymological arguments adduced.

Paragraph [6] again it is crucial to TG's case that the **Apsilians** and **Abazgians** should be ethno-linguistically different peoples. But it is a gross non-sequitur to conclude that they were ethno-linguistically distinct solely because the ancient sources refer to them side by side. It is entirely natural and common at different moments in history for separate tribes of one and the same larger ethnic group to be referred to by their local tribal designation rather than by the super-ordinate ethnonym they hold in common. For a perfect example of this one need look no further than *kartlis tskhovraḡa* where it is common-place to find the residents of the various regions of Georgia referred to according to their regional names (e.g. K'akhs, Kartlians, Heretians, Imeretians, Gurians, Lechkhumians, etc...) -- the regions were, after all, quite often in open conflict with one another! If one follows TG's logic, the conclusion must be that none of the peoples just listed were/are ethno-linguistically inter-related. I think most Georgians will prefer the tribal/regional analysis and thus allow that the ancient **Apsilians** and **Abazgians** might equally well, and indeed more convincingly, be viewed as having been just tribal representatives of a single ethnos, which is the commonly accepted opinion and the one in defence of which I shall be arguing.

Footnote [4] the suggestion is offered that the element *-il-* within the ethnonym **Apsilian** might be of Kartvelian origin. Readers should know that the element in question has the shape *-el-* in Georgian (cf. *kartv-el-* 'Georgian', *megr-el-* 'Mingrelian', *inglis-el-* 'Englishman') not *-il-*. And so, had there ever existed in Georgian such an adjectival form built on the root *aps-/apš-*; it would have contained the vowel *-e-*. If such a form did exist as source for the Latin form seen in Pliny's phrase *gens Apsilae* (Greek 'Αψιλαί), when and why did it disappear; in Georgian there is only **apšil-**. Is it not more plausible that this latter is derived from the Latin form just quoted, with the palatal rather than the alveolar fricative being an internal development that occurred simultaneously with the borrowing of the item? In his own recent etymology of the Abkhazians' self-designation Chirikba (Forthcoming) has proposed an Abkhazian origin for the post-radical liquid: considering the dual functions of the morpheme *-c ʕ-* as nominal pluraliser for human nouns (*ʕ-jab-c ʕ* 'the-girl-s') and as intra-verbal adverbial indicator that the verbal activity has been carried out to excess (*kʔa-s-ʕ-c ʕ-ʔ-ɣt* 'something-I-eat-to excess-PAST-FINITE' = 'I ate too much') and recalling that in modern Abkhaz a verbal suffix *-ʕ-/* exists to denote iterative, frequentative activity, one could conceive that at an earlier stage in its development Abkhaz might have employed this same suffix as a nominal pluraliser, even though this function is no longer carried by the suffix in question. This possibility makes it even more likely that the reference in an Assyrian text of the XIIth century B.C. to an **Abešla** people might indeed point to some ancestors of the Abkhazians.

Footnote [5] it is stated that the presence of the words **apsarta enita** 'in the language of the Apsars' in XVIIIth century manuscripts of *kartlis tskhovraḡa*

shews that an adjective *აფსაზ-* «was still in use at that time in the Georgian-speaking world to denote the modern Apswa-Abkhazians.» Firstly it needs to be pointed out that, according to Q'aukhchishvili (vol II, p.58), these two words appear in codices M and m, of which the former, the Mariam Codex, is dated to 1633-46, whereas the second, the Mačabeli Codex, is dated to 1736. And so, we seem to be talking of a XVIIth century addition at the latest. Regardless of when these two words were first appended to the text -- presumably the Mariam Codex could be a copy of an earlier manuscript now lost in which they were present -- surely all that needs to be read into the adjective *აფსაზ-* is an attempt on the part of the author/copyist to shew off his erudition by seeking to render as faithfully as possible in Georgian the Abkhazians' own self-designation, for the collective plural of *აფსაზ-* 'Abkhazian' is *აფსაზ-აფსაზ-აფსაზ* which, given that Georgian lacks the semi-vowel [w], would very easily give rise to the sequence *აფსაზ-*. Abkhaz has a collective plural formant in *-აფსაზ-* but this is of restricted use, usually found with the young of animals whose singular in most cases ends in *-აფსაზ* itself replaced in the plural; there is no evidence that this formant was ever employed with ethnonyms. As regards *აფსაზ-*, there is no reason for supposing that it represented a widely used or long-standing epithet in the Georgian language. One thing, however, is certain -- Q'aukhchishvili's definition of *აფსაზ-ი-* 'Apsarians' in his glossary of proper-nouns (vol II, p.636) as «one of the Kartvelian tribes in Western Georgia» is pure fantasy.

Paragraph [12] Greek **Abazg-** is suggested to be associated with Georgian **აფსაზ-**, leaving the ethnonym **Abaza** isolated, which might strike the reader who knows nothing about the history of the North West Caucasus as quite reasonable when told, as here, that **Abaza** «has quite a different sense and belongs to the N. Caucasian, Cherkess-Adyghean linguistic world». The 30,000 plus Abazinians, it is true, live today in Karachay-Cherkessia on the northern slopes of the Caucasus. There are two dialects, T'ap'anta and Ashkharawa. Although a script was created for Abaza by the Soviets, with the literary language being based on the T'ap'anta dialect, from a strictly linguistic viewpoint, Abaza is just a divergent dialect of Abkhaz. It is generally accepted that the ancestors of the Abazinians originally lived on the territory of today's Abkhazia and that migrations out of Abkhazia northwards across the Klukhor Pass began in the XIVth century (Georgian Encyclopædia vol I, p.11), which explains how the present-day division between the Abazinians and the Abkhazians proper came about. This fact is nowhere mentioned by TG and should raise suspicions about the ease with which he dismisses any possible link between the ethnonym **Abaza** and the Greek form **Abazg-**.

Paragraph [14] it is stated that the traditional view, which derives Georgian **აფსაზ-** from Greek **Abazg-**, cannot explain the shift of the velar element from post-z voiced plosive to post-p voiceless fricative. Already in Footnote [6] the problem of this velar component had been raised -- on the assumption that **Abaza** was the source of **Abazg-**, the **-g-** was evidently derived by M. Inadze from some suffix of origin **-x-**. But now in paragraphs [15/16/17] the Georgian form **აფსაზ-** is argued to be the source, leading to the familiar Greek term through a transformation that avoids the non-Greek sequence **-φχ-** by shifting

the voiceless, aspirated velar plosive to post-sigma position and voicing (!) it to produce the more acceptable complex $-\sigma\gamma-$, which in turn gave way to the even more acceptable $-\sigma\kappa-$. Presumably, since in paragraph [15] the Georgian source is presented as **apxaz-//abxa:z-**, the reader is meant to assume that the variant with $-b-$ accounts for the same voiced plosive in **Abazg-**. But in paragraph [19] we are told that the form **abxa:z-** is in fact Arabic-Persian. And so, if Georgian **apxaz-** alone is taken as source for the Greek, we must further hypothesise a voicing of intervocalic $-p-$ as part of the borrowing-process.

It seems to me that this is all far from being straightforward and convincing. Just for the sake of argument let us accept the possibility of Georgian **apxaz-** being the source: what would we expect in Greek, given our knowledge of Greek phonology? It is true that the sequence $-\phi\chi-$ is not found in Greek. However, complexes containing two voiceless, aspirated plosives did exist (e.g. $-\phi\theta-$ || $-\chi\theta-$ || $-\chi\phi-$, cf. Allen 1968.24), and so I could well imagine the sequence $-\phi\chi-$ being tolerated in a rendition of a foreign ethnonym, had the circumstance arisen. However, let us further allow that the velar element was shifted -- why then was it voiced to give a gamma? TG might answer that the Georgian 'source' had a voiced alveolar fricative at this position, and so Greek would naturally voice the velar as the result of voicing assimilation. But there is a problem here. Greek had no voiced alveolar fricative phoneme $/z/$, so that intervocalic $-z-$ would most likely have been transformed in Greek as a dzeta (just as in Footnote [16] Georgian **laz-eb-i** 'Laz' are shewn to be rendered in Greek as $\Lambda\alpha\zeta\omicron\upsilon$). This would lead us to expect in Greek the unattested $*\text{A}\beta\alpha\zeta\omicron\upsilon$, where, of course, the complex $-\zeta\gamma-$ is itself hardly a happy one in Greek. The difficulty is compounded when we take into consideration the fact that the sequence sigma+gamma is itself something of a rarity in Greek, especially when no morpheme-boundary falls between the two, as it does in the quoted example $\delta\upsilon\sigma\gamma\epsilon\nu\epsilon\iota\alpha$ 'low birth'; is it really likely that a rarity such as that seen in the other quoted word 'υσγινον 'red dye from the plant 'υσγη' would be created by the Greeks in order to avoid the sequence $-\phi\chi-$? TG acknowledges that the complex sigma+kappa is much commoner, and, since it was later introduced to give $\text{A}\beta\alpha\sigma\kappa\omicron\upsilon$, why was it not introduced right at the start? Given the problems in Greek with both $-\zeta\gamma-$ and $-\phi\chi-$, one would perhaps expect that, if indeed Georgian **apxaz-** had been the source, the Greeks would simply have left out the troublesome velar to give themselves the straightforward but unattested $*\text{A}\phi\alpha\zeta\omicron\upsilon$.

Let us now re-examine the case for **Abaza** being the starting-point for **Abazg-** (and, of course, Georgian **apxaz-**). One commonly reads the statement that the Abazinians style themselves **Abáza** (cf. Georgian Lomtadze 1954.IX, Abazinian Tabulova 1976.4), though the Russian linguist Genko observes (1955.7) that this practice is a recent phenomenon under the influence of Russian and Kabardian (Circassian) usage, since the word is of Circassian (Cherkess-Adyghean) origin, where it serves to designate all non-Circassian North West Caucasians (i.e. all Abkhazo-Abazinians AS WELL AS the Ubykhs). When Greeks

first made landfall on the Black Sea's N.E. coast, we can reasonably suppose that they made contact with the mass of N.W. Caucasians, who, in the north of Colchis/Lazika, will no doubt have been distributed much as they were when such Englishmen as Bell, Longworth and Spencer travelled in the region in the 1830s (viz. Circassian tribes to the north of the Ubykhs, who were settled around Sochi, whilst to the south of these down to the border with Mingrelia were the Abkhazians), with the obvious exception that the ancestors of today's Abazinians still resided somewhere in the territory we now style Abkhazia. It is easy to conceive that in this N.W. Caucasian milieu the Greeks will have come across reference to an **Abaza**-people. If we assume that the Greeks sought to render this ethnonym in their language, how can we account for it appearing as Ἄβασοι?

The final sequence of vowels simply represents the Nominative plural of *o*-stem nouns, and so let us tackle the problem of the velar plosive. Two possibilities suggest themselves: (a) if the word was pluralised by a native Abazinian, and if the plural then mirrored its modern formation, the result would have been **Abáza-k^oa**. Labialisation would probably have been ignored, as neither this secondary articulation nor an approximation in the guise of the semi-vowel [w] were available in Greek -- I am grateful to my colleague Bruce Ingham for pointing out that the assignment of the ethnonym in Greek to the *o*-stem declension might have been motivated by a desire somehow to accommodate this labiality, though if one derives Greek Σαννίται 'Sanigs' from Abkhazian *A-xaxt-k^oʷ* then the question arises as to why this Greek ethnonym is in the *a*-declension when the putative source-ending is the same as before (viz. *-k^oʷ*). Assuming the third *a*-vowel to have been weakly articulated in post-accentual position, a Greek might easily have perceived a sequence [zk], which could then without difficulty have led to [zg] by voicing assimilation. Faced with the problem of writing what he heard, there would be no alternative, given the absence of a phoneme /z/ and any corresponding graph, to writing Ἄβασοι; this would have been pronounced [abazg], which is just what we are striving to explain. The alternative is (b): if the word was pluralised by a native Circassian, and if the plural then mirrored its modern formation, the result would have been **Abadze-xe(-r)**, where *-r* is the Definite Absolutive ending. Assuming the velar fricative here could have been transformed into Greek gamma in some way similar to what has just been described in the (a)-solution, the problem would then be the non-representation in Greek by dzeta of the Circassian affricate. This leads me to prefer explanation (a). If the complex sigma+gamma was a faithful approximation of what the early Greeks actually perceived, the subsequent Greek-internal modification to sigma+kappa will have been motivated by a desire to replace a rare complex by a commoner one.

It is now time to face TG's objection that a transformation of Greek **Abazg-** into Georgian **apxaz-** is inexplicable. The Greek letters beta and gamma were certainly voiced plosives in the classical period, whereas in Modern Greek they represent fricative [v] and [ɣ]. It is not known when exactly the shift occurred, but it seems from the employment of beta to represent [v] in the alphabet created by Cyril for Russian that the change will have been completed by the

IXth century (Allen 1968:30). As far as I am aware, the earliest attestation of the term **apxaz-** in Georgian is in the Life of Abo by Ioane Sabanisdze, which is supposed to have been composed shortly after the saint's death at the end of the VIIIth century, though the oldest manuscript dates from the Xth. If Georgian did borrow the Greek ethnonym, the loan could conceivably have taken place when the characters had their original plosive value or later when they (or perhaps just one of them) had fricative articulation. TG observes that, since the complexes $\text{-}\beta\gamma\text{-}/\text{-}\gamma\text{-}$ are both found in Georgian, there is no reason why either of them should have been transformed, if indeed Greek was the source-language. He also tries to forestall any attempt to appeal to the alternation seen in $\beta\gamma\alpha\tau\tau\acute{\iota}\nu\acute{\iota}$ vs $\beta\alpha\tau\tau\acute{\iota}\nu\acute{\iota}$ 'nestling' in order to find support within Georgian itself for the forward-shift of the problematic (post-)velar element by stressing that such alternation is found only with the so-called 'harmonic' complexes (i.e. those which function morpho-phonemically as though there were just a single consonant present and which were thus not amenable to anaptyxis), referring the reader to his own and Givi Mač'avariani's 1965 book on Kartvelian ablaut (Footnote 2, page 304 [actually it is p.305! -- BGH]). Neither $\text{-}\beta\gamma\text{-}/\text{-}\gamma\text{-}$ counts as a harmonic complex. However, in his own little book on Kartvelian consonantism (1965) Mač'avariani did include the sequence $\text{-}\gamma\text{-}$ within one sub-class of harmonics (p.88). Given the controversial status of this sequence, perhaps a shift forward for the velar fricative is not entirely unnatural. Even so, we should then have to account for the devoicing of the resulting complex near the start of the word ($\text{*}\beta\gamma\text{-} \Rightarrow \text{-}\beta\alpha\text{-}$). If the bilabial element was indeed still plosive at the time of the loan, this would be problematical. However, if we are assuming that gamma had already passed to the modern-day fricative articulation, can we not assume the same for beta? If the Greek-internal shift involved an intermediate bi-labial fricative stage, since Georgian never had any such sound, speakers might conceivably have heard Greek [β] as nearest to their own [p], which, following the forward-movement of the voiced velar fricative, would have yielded the required complex $\text{-}\beta\alpha\text{-}$ by voicing assimilation of the velar component.

It seems to me that this explanation is inherently (i.e. in purely philological terms) no less likely than TG's counter-proposal, and it has the distinct non-philological advantage that it involves no forced conjuring over the historical correspondence between ethnonym and tribe: the Greeks' **Abazgians** were the ancestors of today's Abazinians, whilst the Georgians' **apxaz-eb-i** originally referred in general to those North West Caucasians (i.e. Abazgians and Apsilians) resident on the territory of today's Abkhazia (even if it later for a time came to signify (i) residents of Western Georgia, and (ii) Georgians as a whole as a result of political developments); today the term does not incorporate the Abazinians who now live outside Georgia in the North Caucasus. However, the possibility ought to be considered that the Georgian term does not derive (directly at any rate) from the Greek.

TG quite rightly stressed that, simply because variant A of some word is attested in the historical records earlier than a cognate variant B, it cannot be concluded that variant A is older than B in absolute terms -- B, though actually

older, could be accidentally absent from surviving documents. With this in mind, we should perhaps re-examine the links between Georgian **apxaz-** and the Arabic-Persian forms given by TG himself, namely **Abxa:z/Afxa:z**. The Encyclopædia Iranica cites such writers as Xth century (Arab) Mas'udi and XIth century (Persian) Asadi Tusi, as well as offering the variant **Awraz** from the IX-Xth century (Arab) Ebn Rosta. Even if, however, no Arab-Persian sources earlier than these make reference to the Abkhazians, it does not follow that the ethnonyms could not have existed prior to their documented attestation in the languages concerned. The Persians can be assumed to have been familiar with this region of the Black Sea coast from at least the middle of the first millennium B.C., by which time the Greeks had already colonised the area. And they were certainly active here in the VIth century A.D. The Arabs reached these parts around 700 A.D. Indeed, it is not Persian familiarity with Abkhazia that is in doubt for the early period, by which I mean prior to the time in the late VIIIth century A.D. when Abkhazian king Leon II united today's Western Georgia under the so-called Abkhazian Kingdom, but rather Georgian familiarity with it. This fact will remain difficult to grasp as long as the practice, established around 1930, persists of viewing all Kartvelians as 'Georgians'. Whilst no-one would doubt that the ancestors of the Laz-Mingrelians were from the most ancient of times southern neighbours of the southernmost North West Caucasian speakers (viz. the Abkhaz-Abazinians), it does not follow from this that the Georgians proper have such chronologically remote geographical/linguistic links with this region and its natives, even if among the Kartvelian community the now common view that subsumes 'Mingrelian' within 'Georgian' clouds the issue for them. The time and nature of the establishment of connections between West Georgian (as opposed to West Kartvelian) speakers like the Imeretians and Gurians with the Abkhaz-Abazinians have yet to be established by objective investigations. Such being the case, might not Persian, with the later help of Arabic, have been the source of the Georgian ethnonym, rather than vice versa? Whether by direct adaptation of the plural form of the Abazgians' self-designation or by borrowing from Greek, the Persians could have been faced with a final complex $-z\gamma/-z\gamma$, neither of which today is normal in word-final position, whereas the reverse sequence γz exists quite naturally, e.g. *maz* 'brain', *maz* 'excellent', *az* 'to slip', though the Arabic loan *maz* 'sustenance' is also found in Persian (I am grateful to Bruce Ingham for help here with the Persian and Arabic material). Even for Persian at the period in which we are interested it seems that a final complex of voiced sibilant + velar would have been susceptible to metathesis. The Persian word for 'brain' quoted above, for example, is reconstructed to Proto Indo-European **mav-g(h)-* (cf. Old Church Slavonic *mazgъ*), which in turn leads to Avestan *mazgav-* and Middle Persian *mazg*; metathesis here produces Classical Persian *maz* (the early New Persian variant *maz* being possibly the result of secondary metathesis rather than a direct continuation of the M.Persian form). The date of the metathesis $-z\gamma \Rightarrow \gamma z$ is difficult to date but may go back to Old Iranian (cf. P.Horn in **Grundriss der iranischen Philologie, I/2**, edited by W. Geiger and E. Kuhn, Strassburg

1898-1901, p.69) -- I am most grateful to Nicholas Sims-Williams for the whole of the preceding information on the etymology of the Persian for 'brain'. If just such a metathesis did indeed affect the ethnonym of interest to us, then we can easily assume that, faced with a Persian form that ended in $-ayz$ the Arabs might well have re-syllabified this by shifting the velar (fricative) to earlier in the word in order to bring the form into greater harmony with other ethnonyms in Arabic, e.g. **Ahwa:z/Axwa:z** 'Khuz' (in Elam), **Aʿrab** 'Arabs', **Aḥba:š** 'Abyssinians', **Aqba:t** 'Copts', **Afya:n** 'Afghans', **Asba:n** 'Spaniards', and especially **Atra:k** 'Turks' and **Akra:d** 'Kurds', where we see a parallel metathesis of the rhotic. The precise nature of the consonant-complex resulting from the hypothesised metathesis remains to be investigated further, but the sequence $-ay-$ of Ebn Rosta is going to be difficult to explain on the basis of a borrowing from Georgian $-ax-$ in any case. One might tentatively suggest:

$-ay- / -ay- \Rightarrow -ax- \Rightarrow -fx-$: The new Arabic form could then have been re-borrowed into Persian, just as they re-borrowed the very word *Fārs* 'Persian' with Arabic *f*- in place of the original Persian *p*- (I am grateful to Nicholas Sims-Williams again for this observation). Once the Arab-Persian fluctuation **Abxa:z/Afxa:z** became established, a borrowing into Georgian in the shape of **apxaz-** is straightforward: from **-bx-** the devoicing of the **-b-** is natural, whilst from **-fx-** there is no choice but to produce **-px-**, as Georgian possesses no [f]. Also long vowels do not exist in Georgian, so that vowel-length too would disappear. For the extent of Persian loans in Georgian see Andronik'ashvili (1966). Such a derivational path again avoids the necessity to manipulate the correspondence between ethnonym and ethnos. And so, I would maintain there are at least two possible explanations of the relationship between Greek **Abazg-** and Georgian **apxaz-**, both awarding priority to the former, which deserve greater favour than the one contrived by TG, which I would dismiss out of hand.

Paragraph [17] having argued in favour of the form **apxaz-/abxa:z** being the starting-point for the creation of Greek **Abazg-**, TG abruptly informs the reader that this form was not merely primary amongst those under examination but that it represented at the time of Greek penetration into the area an actual self-designation of some local tribe. No proof of any kind is adduced to support the assertion that this Georgian word was ever anything other than a means for Georgians to refer to one particular member of the North West Caucasian family. Even if one accepts the historical priority of the Georgian form, it most certainly does not follow that it ever functioned as a self-designation for any tribe in the area.

Paragraphs [20/21] having divorced **Abaza** from **Abazg-**, TG now attempts to link the former with the Abkhazians' self-designation **Apswa**, by presenting the derivational path as: $*\text{abaza} \Rightarrow *abza \Rightarrow *apza \Rightarrow \text{apz-wa}$. Footnote [11] presents evidence in support of vowel-reduction in the post-accentual syllable, and indeed it is true that the Abkhazians' self-designation is stressed on the first syllable. But the point at issue is that there is no evidence to suggest that the imputed proto-form $*\text{abaza}$ ever carried initial stress, for in Abaza today, as

indicated above, the accent is on the middle syllable. If the word did ever exist in Abkhaz (N.B. that the Abkhazians' ethnonym for the Abazinians is *Азырҭа* vs plural *Азырҭаҭ* for information note that the Abkhazians' generic term for non-Abkhaz-Abazinian N.W. Caucasians is *ҭ-аах* vs plural *ҭ-аах* which is reminiscent of the Greeks' *Ζυγοι*/*Ζυκχοι*), there is no reason to believe that it would have taken anything other than a medial accent.

A further problem with TG's derivation concerns the devoicing of the intervocalic complex *-аа-* (after all, intervocalic position is a typically voicing environment!) . In support of such a possibility he adduces the pair: Abkhaz *ҭ-аах* vs Abaza *ҭ-аах* 'knife'. But this provides no support of any kind for the derivation under review, since the devoicing in this word is in the Abaza dialect/language rather than the standard Abkhaz dialect/language in which TG's derivation is supposed to have occurred. Furthermore, one can offer a plausible explanation of the devoicing of the Abaza variant -- the voicelessness of the pharyngeal fricative could have been extended to the whole word by some sort of harmony; such an explanation is impossible for the ethnonym we are examining.

The final difficulty with TG's derivation is that it gives us the simple alveolar fricative *-s-* in the resulting form. As noted in his Footnote [4], the northern Bzyp dialect contains the alveolo-palatal *-š-*, which TG took as source for the palato-alveolar *-š-* in Georgian's **apšileti**. Now southern literary Abkhaz has only the contrast *s-š* whereas northern Bzyp has the three-way opposition *s-š-š*. It is standard linguistic practice to assume that, unless there is something in the phonetic environment which can explain the introduction of a previously absent opposition, then the kind of situation facing us when contrasting southern and northern forms of Abkhaz has to be explained by arguing that southern Abkhaz has lost the 3-way opposition in the hissing-hushing sibilants preserved in Bzyp. If, then, Bzyp has the self-designation *Апырҭа* how does TG account for the presence here of the alveolo-palatal, given that his proto-form is **аах*? In fact, Chirikba (Forthcoming) has recently put forward a convincing etymology of the Abkhazians' self-designation. He links it to the verb 'die', so that the original sense of the term would have been 'he who is mortal'. Such an origin for self-designations is quite common among the world's languages, and Chirikba begins his article by citing some relevant examples, including some taken from a book by TG and his co-author, Ivanov (1984:475)! The root of the verb 'die' in Bzyp is *аах* (= literary *аах*).

In support of the second leg of his derivation **аах* TG quotes the reference in Pliny to a people **Abzoe** living between the Azov and Caspian seas. As TG himself observes, the geography is somewhat problematic! More to the point is that there is no indication that these **Abzoes** were in any way identified by Pliny with a people we would feel impelled to identify with the (ancestors of the) Abkhazians.

In support of the third leg of his derivation TG adduces in Footnote [13] the modern Abkhaz plural forms of the self-designation, namely *Апырҭа-ц* / *Апырҭа-к*. It is true that the distributive plural is indeed *Апырҭа-ц* but, although the second variant in *-к* is quoted from the world-authority on Abkhaz, Ketevan

Lomtadze, no Abkhazian I have asked about it accepts this word in any other sense than the plural of *ჭიჭი* 'Caucasian fir-tree; lance'.

Footnote [13] perhaps one should point out that the plurals just discussed with unsynocopated *-s* also take stress on the first syllable.

Paragraph [24] having axiomatised an ethno-linguistic distinction between Apsilians and Abazgians, and having axiomatised that the Greeks' Abazgians had the self-designation **apxaz-**, TG naturally argues that, since this form **apxaz-** is Georgian (Kartvelian?) in origin, the tribe in question must also have been Kartvelian and thus related to the Svans and Mingrelo-Laz. As we have already stated, even allowing for the priority of the term **apxaz-**, we could in no way accept this conclusion, because it is based on two false premises (viz. TG's own axioms).

Paragraph [25] Colchis for the Greeks was a rather imprecise geographical term, and, even if lexical items from West Kartvelian languages/dialects did enter the Greek lexicon, it does not follow at all that Kartvelian speakers formed any portion (let alone a majority) of the population of Abkhazia proper, since Colchis certainly incorporated the Western Georgian provinces to the south of Abkhazia that we know today as Mingrelia, Guria and Ač'ara.

Is the phrase «the speech of the Greek Argonauts» being used in metaphorical usage to refer simply to pre-classical Greek, or is there a hint of some inability to distinguish between myth and history?

Paragraph [26] a list is presented of a variety of tribes from ancient Colchis that various Georgian (!) scholars have argued to have been Kartvelian. Whilst no-one would, I suppose, want to argue against the Kartvelian ethnicity of the Laz, Sans/Zans, and Makrones, there must be severe doubts about the ascription of the Sanigs and the Heniokhs to this Kartvelian family -- there is no compelling reason to identify the Sanigs with the Sans/Zans, as Kartvelian commentators often perfunctorily do, since an argument exists that identifies them with the Abkhaz/Ubykh (there is some dispute over their precise ethnicity) tribe who in Abkhaz are called *А-сант-и-с* As for the Heniokhs, even their geographical placement is in doubt, and, as the word is only etymologisable in Greek (it means 'Charioteers'), their ethnicity is clouded in mystery. However, even if we do allow all these peoples to be grouped together as Kartvelians, again it in no way follows that, since **apxaz-/Abazgians** are mentioned in the ancient sources alongside them, these **apxaz-/Abazgians** too must *for this very reason* be regarded as Kartvelians themselves.

Paragraph [28] the country of the Missimians is mentioned as forming part of Abazgia from the VIth century. Although TG does not pursue the ethnic identity of this tribe, it has been suggested elsewhere by Kartvelian (Q'aukhchishvili 1936, for example) scholars that they too were Kartvelians. This latter association has recently been taken up by Lortkipanidze, and, since this debate also demonstrates how important philological data can be to historical argumentation, I wish to include here some comments on the interpretation of the relevant text.

On page 9 (i.e. in the Georgian text) of Lortkipanidze's brochure 'The Abkhazians and Abkhazia' (Tbilisi 1990), of which TG's article is a sort of

philological equivalent, she quotes approvingly the views of certain Kartvelian scholars to the effect that the Missimians were of Kartvelian stock. In the Russian original of his scathing review of this work (newspaper **Abxazija**, 16 July 1991, p.3) the Russian archæologist/historian, Yuri Voronov, stated: «To claim that culturally and historically the Missimians were Kartvelians is an affront to the memory of Agathias.» In her reply to this criticism (newspaper **Svobodnaja Gruzija** 9 Aug 1991, p.3) Lortkipanidze states: «Although Agathias underlines the relatedness of the Apsilians and Missimians, he also stresses that their languages as well as their customs were different.» And in an adapted version of his original review, written to take account of Lortkipanidze's response and hopefully soon to be available in English, Voronov re-emphasises that Agathias in the 7th century testified to the «cultural and linguistic closeness of the Apsilians and Missimians.» How can this divergence of interpretation be explained?

Agathias' text was published in volume III of his charming series **georgik'a**, which contains Greek writers' reports on Georgia, by Q'aukhchishvili in 1936. All texts in this 8-volume series are given a parallel translation into Georgian. The relevant passage occurs on page 86. If we translate the Georgian into English, we obtain: «Sot'erike went down into the country of the so-called Missimians, who are subjects, like the Apsilians, of the king of the Colchians, but they speak in a different language and also pursue different laws.» Now both the English and Georgian versions are rather ambiguous as to which two of the three peoples mentioned are being contrasted in terms of their languages and customs -- is it the Missimians and the Apsilians (as Lortkipanidze argues), or is it the Missimians and the Colchians (as Voronov interprets the sentence)? Neither the Georgian nor the English can resolve the matter, but, of course, we can refer (and in all conscience must do so) to the Greek original. In the Greek there is no ambiguity of any sort for the simple reason that the language possesses a pair of clitics (μεν...δε) whose job is to accompany and thereby indicate each component of a contrasting pair. The relative clause here has the Missimians as its head; within the clause our clitics appear, the former following the complement 'subjects' (κατηκοοῦ), the latter coming after the noun for 'language' (γλωττη, which is the Dative singular form). The interpretation is clear -- the Missimians, while they are subjects of the Colchians differ from them in language and customs. The phrase 'like the Apsilians' (καθαπου και 'οι 'Αψιλοι) is an appendage to the first qualifying remark about the Missimians and is to be understood as stating that both the Missimians and the Apsilians were subjects of the Colchians. Taking the passage on page 86 with the statement on page 162 that the Apsilians were a «common [i.e. related] and neighbouring people» to the Missimians (Ἄψιλιους γε ὄντας ὁμοδιαίτους και ἄγχιτερμονας), we see that Voronov is perfectly correct in stressing the cultural and linguistic genetic relatedness of the Apsilians and the Missimians, which latter word in Greek must again derive from the Abkhazian surname *Μαργα*; the princely holders of which traditionally lived around Ts'ebelda (Tibelos of Agathias' Greek text), as the Abkhazian historian Anchabadze proposed (1959.14) and have nothing to do with

the Svans' self-designation *მაჭხალები* on the basis of which suggestion Q'aukhchishvili hypothesised that the Missimians, like the Apsars, were a Kartvelian tribe occupying areas of present-day Abkhazia!

What this diversion has demonstrated is that historians have a duty to consult wherever possible original texts before framing statements that might well have no historical validity, AND that linguists have a duty to reflect as accurately and in as much detail as possible facts about the languages on which they work, so that their imprecise statements do not form the basis for the mistakes of others -- I have in mind here specifically the unfortunately ambiguous translation appended by Q'aukhchishvili to the Agathias text on page 86, which seems to have led Lortkipanidze astray.

One further comment is appropriate on Lortkipanidze's booklet since it involves another philological ruse that needs to be exposed in the context of the present discussion. On page 10 she quotes a passage from page 251 of volume I of *kartlis tskhovreba* which is designed to support her contention that Abkhazian king Leon acquired his Western Georgian territories as a result of a voluntary dynastic act -- in other words she wishes to avoid having to acknowledge that an Abkhazian king might ever have been militarily powerful enough to seize Georgian soil through force of arms. The quote is presented in the form: *და რ-პიტი-ა აპხაზეთ-ი და აგრის-ი ვიდრე ლიხ-ა-მდე* 'And he held Abkhazia and Egrisi as far as the Likhi Mountains'. However, if one consults the edition from which this quote is taken, one sees that the word-divisions are not quite identical; the full sentence reads thus: *ესე მეორე ლეონ ასულ-ის ძე-ის რ-გ-ო კაზარ-თა მეფ-ისა, და ჯაფ-იტა მათ-იტა გა-ა-ღ-ა ბერქენ-თა, და-რ-პიტი-ა აპხაზეთ-ი და აგრის-ი ვიდრე ლიხ-ა-მდე, სახელ-რ-ღ-ა მეფე აპხაზ-თა, რამეთუ მი-ცვალ-ებ-ულ რ-გ-ო იოანე და და-ბერ-ებ-ულ რ-გ-ო ძეუანშერ* 'This second Leon was the son of the daughter of the king of the Khazars, and through their might he broke free of the Greeks [Byzantines], took possession of Abkhazia and Egrisi as far as the Likhi Mountains, [and] placed upon himself the title of King of the Abkhazians, since Ioane had died and Džuanšer had grown old'. The text contains three dynamic verbs (or verbs of action), namely *გა-ა-ღ-ა*, *და-რ-პიტი-ა*, *სახელ-რ-ღ-ა* which describe three actions of Leon and which are linked asyndetonically (i.e. there is no actual conjunction *და* 'and' in the Georgian). Lortkipanidze's subtle alteration might suit her historical argument but it hardly makes sense as a piece of textual criticism; to have a stative verb (*რ-პიტი-ა* 'he held') as the middle verb of three, when the two outer verbs are dynamic, and to have this stative expression linked to the first clause by means of a co-ordinating conjunction, when no linkage is present for the third and final clause, would be extremely unsatisfactory from a syntactic point of view. Lortkipanidze is, of course, not the first Kartvelian to find the use of the dynamic verb *და-რ-პიტი-ა* 'he seized' troublesome here, given the reluctance to accept one-time Abkhazian dominance by force of arms over Western Georgia -- in his justly discredited attempt to falsify Abkhazian history (*გეოგრაფიკული მხარდა* 1954) P'avle Ingoroq'va suggested that the verb in this context was not being used in the sense 'seize' but in the sense of 'freeing (sc. from Byzantine lordship)'. Although this exegesis met with the approval of the historian N. Berdzenishvili in his review of Ingoroq'va (p.131 of *მხარდა*

‘Luminary’ 12, 1956), there is no philological justification for assuming that this dynamic verb ever meant anything other than ‘seize, capture’. Once again, then, philology is demonstrated to be being manipulated in order to buttress an unacceptable historical argument, whereas the correct procedure must surely be to build a historical account that fits the unmanipulated evidence, whether philological or not.

Paragraph [32] the statement that the term **Abaza** is of generic reference to include Abkhazians plus Abazinians needs to be qualified: this may well be true of the use of the term in modern-day Turkey or amongst Circassians in general, but it would not apply to the English, Russian or, of course, Abazinian usages of this term, for example.

Paragraph [36] TG is left with the difficulty of clarifying precisely when the term **apxaz-** came to be restricted to those people who call themselves Apswa; he should perhaps also ask himself the question: «If indeed, as argued in the article under review, there was originally on the territory of modern Abkhazia a Kartvelian tribe that called itself **apxaz-**, when and why did this Kartvelian tribe disappear from the pages of history?» This problem dissolves if one accepts the traditional view that, on the one hand, **Apsilian** and **Apswa** are etymologically related, whilst, on the other hand, both Greek Ἀβασσι- and Georgian **apxaz-** are etymologically related to the Circassian/Abaza term **Abáza**. In its earliest attestation in Georgian the term **apxaz-** referred to the various Abazo-Abkhazian tribes who were still all resident in the territory called today Abkhazia. When King Leon II of Abkhazia united the whole of Western Georgia in the late VIIIth century by «seizing Abkhazia and Egrisi as far as the Likhi [Mountains]» (*kartlis tskhovrebá*), he established the so-called Kingdom of Abkhazia, which lasted until the accession of Bagrat III in 975 produced the first king of a united Georgia (viz. west and east of the Likhi Mountains). During the years of this Abkhazian Kingdom the term **apxazeti/Abkhazia** came to signify the whole of Western Georgia. Subsequently, during the years when the new Georgian state remained united (i.e. upto 1245) this term was often used as a synonym for **sakartvelo** ‘Georgia’ as a whole. Thereafter it naturally narrowed again in reference to resume its original function of indicating the area we know today as Abkhazia, and simultaneously the ethnonym **apxaz-/Abkhazian** resumed its role as designator of the autochthonous denizens of that very territory.

It is, furthermore, entirely logical to conclude that the only reason the great Queen Tamar chose to endow her son Giorgi (IVth of Georgia) with the nickname **Laša** «which is translated in the language of the Apsars as ‘enlightener of the world’» (*kartlis tskhovrebá*) was to give recognition to that Abkhazian ethnos which had played such an important role over a period of 200 years during the Abkhazian Kingdom in bringing together the whole of Western Georgia which in Tamar’s day (1184-1213) was such a significant part of her Caucasian domains.

References

Allen, W.S. (1968) *Περὶ Γραικῶν* Cambridge: University Press.

- Anchabadze, Z.B. (1959) *Iz istorii srednevekovoj Abkazii (VI-XVII vv.)* [From the History of Mediæval Abkhazia] Sukhum: State Press.
- Andronik'ashvili, M. (1966) *nark'vevebi iranul-kartuli enobrivi urtiertabidan* [Essays on the Iranian-Georgian Linguistic Relation] Tbilisi: University Press.
- Bynon, T. (1977) *Historical Linguistics* Cambridge: University Press.
- Chirikba, V.A. (Forthcoming) On the etymology of the ethnonym **ápšwa** 'Abkhaz', in *American Annual of Caucasian Linguistics*.
- Gamq̄relidze, T. & Ivanov, V.V. (1984) *Indoevropskij jazyk i indoevropejcy* [Indo-European and the Indo-Europeans], 2 vols. Tbilisi: University Press.
- Genko, A.N. (1955) *Abazinskij jazyk* [The Abaza Language] Moscow: Nauka.
- Hewitt, B.G. (Forthcoming) Languages in contact in N.W. Georgia: fact or fiction? in *Caucasian Perspectives* (ed. B.G. Hewitt).
- Lomtadze, K. (1954) *aškaruli dialekt'i da misi adgili sxva apxazur-abazur dialekt'ha šoris* [The Ashkharawa Dialect and its Place among the Other Abkhaz-Abaza Dialects] Tbilisi: Academy Press.
- Mač'avariani, G. (1965) *saerto-kartveluri k'onsonant'uri sistema* [The Common-Kartvelian Consonantal System] Tbilisi: University Press.
- Q'aukhchishvili, S. (1936) *georgik'a III* T'bilisi: University Press.
- Shanidze [Schanidse], A. Etymologische Studien: Kartli, Kartveli. *Georgika I* Jena, 9-11.
- Tabulova, N.T. (1976) *Grammatika abazinskogo jazyka* [The Grammar of the Abaza Language] Cherkessk: Stavropol Book Publishing-House.
- Voronov, Y. (Forthcoming) Review of Mariam Lordkipanidze's **The Abkhazians and Abkhazia**.