

# RESPONSES TO SOME FANCIFUL IDEAS OF A “HISTORIAN” FROM PARIS, BADRI GOGIA

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On 13 September 2020, an article titled “Notes on the Appropriation of Megrelian Ethnonyms (ABKHA and PSUA) by Abazin(ian) Colonists and the Appearance of the Apsua People” appeared on Badri Gogia's Facebook page<sup>1</sup>. In this article there is an attempt to revive the anti-scholarly hypothesis of the Georgian literary specialist Pavle Ingorokva, which claims that the Abkhazians (endo-ethnonym *Apsua*) arrived in the territory of modern Abkhazia in the 17th century from the North Caucasus, whilst the ancient Abkhazians were actually ‘Georgians’. It should be noted that such a hypothesis has been disproved in academic scholarship and is not supported anywhere in the scholarly world; however, there are "specialists" in the history of Abkhazia who attempt to revive this untenable hypothesis. One such controversial "specialist" is Badri Gogia.

Although the academic scholarly community advises that no attention be paid to anti-scholarly articles, they are often published on various websites and contribute to the formation of incorrect positions on various issues of Abkhazian history.

We have prepared some comments to show how such “specialists” mislead their readers. It should be noted that B. Gogia, while naming various late-mediaeval authors such as Pavel Allepskij, Arkangelo Lamberti, Jacob Reineggs, Jean Chardin, P.S. Pallas, and others, does not provide precise references to their works. However, this does not prevent us from referring to the sources mentioned and determining how accurately this author quotes his various sources.

Starting with Jacob Reineggs

Badri Gogia: “***Even at the end of the 18th century, it was noted (by Jacob Reineggs) that the Abkhazians did not consider themselves aboriginals.***”

**Our comments:** We are well acquainted with the work of Jacob Reineggs, an 18th-century physician and diplomat who lived in Georgia, entitled “A General Historical and Topographical Description of the Caucasus”. In his book, there is a chapter entitled "The Abkhazians" (Die Abghazsier), which provides important information about the peoples of the Caucasus, including the Abkhazians. He writes: “...*Beson, as well as the entire southwestern part of the*

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.facebook.com/story.php?story\\_fbid=10220732367690787&id=1584791269&mib\\_extid=2JQ9oc&paipv=0&eav=AfbBfQE1J23mDCUyEq6NeMrkZIANANIW1f5OVVLhQDyi5Zn1vkPMVjxcj8s4521F5Y0&\\_rdr](https://www.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=10220732367690787&id=1584791269&mib_extid=2JQ9oc&paipv=0&eav=AfbBfQE1J23mDCUyEq6NeMrkZIANANIW1f5OVVLhQDyi5Zn1vkPMVjxcj8s4521F5Y0&_rdr)

*Kurdish mountains, belong to a mighty, warlike ancient nation which call themselves Abkhazians, and their country - Avasa.*"<sup>2</sup>

Jacob Reineggs further reports: "*The geographer Strabo called this people Chaldeans, and Pliny described them as Armeno-Chalybes. Circassians and other peoples call them Avasians and Auasians. However, the people living on the Kuban River, known as the Abadzekhs, consider themselves a colony that long ago separated from the Abkhazians, calling their country Great Avasa, and their own - Lesser Avasa. The opinions of the Abkhazians themselves about their roots vary. Some believe that they did indeed originate from the Armenians; others, conversely, claim that their ancestors came from Egypt. Regardless, in both Great and Lesser Avasa, the inhabitants speak the same language, albeit with different pronunciations, and they share similar customs. This language is completely unlike Armenian, resembling more closely a dialect of Circassian.*"<sup>3</sup>

Considering that in those centuries there was not yet a scholarly school dedicated to the study of the history of the Abkhazian people, such confused, and sometimes incorrect, data about the origin of the Abkhazians are understandable. Jacob Reineggs wrote nothing more about the origin of the Abkhazians, including their alleged arrival in Abkhazia. Moreover, he refers to this people as a "mighty ancient nation", and traces the Abadzekhs, one of the Circassian sub-ethnoses, from the territory of Abkhazia.

Badri Gogia: "***This assimilatory theory is not only supported by maps (for instance, one made by Gastaldi in 1561), but also by the account of Pavel Allepskij (17th century), according to whom there were two Abkhazias (Abkhazana): one completely pagan, and the other - not yet.***"

**Our comments:** Based on the mention of Abkhazia in Pavel Allepskij's work as "Apkhazana," the author attempts to prove that the word "Abkhazia" has Megrelian roots, from the word "apkha" (meaning shoulder) and "zana", a designation for an ancient people in the south-eastern part of the Black Sea, associated with the Laz people.

In reality, Pavel Allepskij's work is far from how B. Gogia tries to present it. Pavel Allepskij personally visited and travelled through Georgia, hence his words can be trusted with a high degree of certainty.

His 17th-century work about Georgia states: "*In the land of Georgia, there are five states. The first is called Imereti... The second state - Kakheti... The third state is Kartli, and its capital is in Tbilisi... The fourth - Mingrelia... The fifth - Guria, outside of Georgia, which is divided by the great river Kori (Rioni).*"<sup>4</sup>

The chronicler writes that the border of Georgian lands stretches from the Alazani River to "Opkhazi," i.e., to Abkhazia, and does not include the latter in the composition of Georgian

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<sup>2</sup> Jacob Reineggs. Allgemeine historisch-topographische Beschreibung des Kaukasus. Gotha. 1796. p.4.

<sup>3</sup> Jacob Reineggs. Allgemeine historisch-topographische Beschreibung des Kaukasus. Gotha. 1796. p.5

<sup>4</sup> Anthology of the literature of Orthodox Arabs. Volume 1. Moscow, 2020. pp.320-322.

lands. Elsewhere, describing the land of Mingrelia, he reports: “*The land of Mingrelia stretches ten days from the river Koni (Tskhenistskali) to the Opkhatc state, where the throne of the Opkhazians was.*”<sup>5</sup>

Referring to Mount Elbrus, P. Allepskij wrote: “*There live 300 languages on that mountain. It begins from Abkhazia. There are two states in Abkhazana; one state is under the suzerainty of the Dadiani of Mingrelia, and they are Christians in name but unbaptised. They venerate holy icons and respect churches, but they are unbaptised because they have neither lords nor priests.*”<sup>6</sup>

This passage talks about Greater and Lesser Abkhazia, which possibly emerged during the era of the Ottoman Empire's conquest of the Western Caucasus and are known from many sources starting from the 17th century. Greater Abkhazia is the Abkhazian Principality, and Lesser Abkhazia is Sadzen or Dzhigetia. It should be noted that many authors of the late mediaeval period wrote the name of Abkhazia differently. We have recorded the following spellings: *Abasches, Abascie, Abassa, Abassie, l'Avogafie, l'Abcassia, Awhasia, Abgaz, Afkas*, etc., in total - more than 15 variants. The attempt to derive the name “Abkhazia” from the Megrelian word “apkha” based on an incorrect spelling by Pavel Allepskij (“Apkhazana”) is linguistically insignificant. Moreover, it should be considered that P. Allepskij himself encountered several spellings of the name Abkhazia due to hearing it differently from the residents of Mingrelia, Guria, and Kartli.

Badri Gogia: “***Peter Simon Pallas, in the same era, wrote that the Abkhazians originated from the north-western part of the Caucasian mountains.***”

**Our comments:** The work of P.S. Pallas is very important for the study of the peoples of the Caucasus, however, it remains a mystery why some Georgian “historians” attribute to this researcher of Caucasian peoples something he did not write.

Speaking of Abkhazia and the Abkhazians, P.S. Pallas provides a detailed description of the “Abaza” people and divides their settlement-territory into two parts: “Lesser” and “Greater Abaza”. By Lesser Abaza, he refers to the settlement of the Abazins in the North Caucasus; and by Greater Abaza, part of the North Caucasus and the modern coast of Krasnodar Krai and Abkhazia.

P.S. Pallas specifically wrote about the Abazin(ian)s of the North Caucasus: “*All Abazins, or Absne (the self-name of this people - absne), in the Russian, Tatar, and Circassian languages - Abaza, in Georgian - Abkhazeti. Six tribes of Alti-keseke are called Circassians of Tabanta, and all others - kush-khasip, that is, people living beyond the mountains... They appear to be the indigenous inhabitants of the North-western Caucasus, and formerly occupied a vast area, from which they were displaced and pushed to the mountains by the Circassians, who, through prolonged raids and exterminations, significantly reduced their number... Moreover, it is entirely certain that in the country beyond the mountains, inhabited by other Abazin tribes from Greater Abaza, along the Black Sea coast to Iskuria, or ancient Dioscurias, this original language with several of its dialects is the prevailing language. Even in ancient times, they*

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid. p.322.

<sup>6</sup> Anthology of the literature of Orthodox Arabs. Volume 1. Moscow, 2020. pp.327

*were apparently a predatory people, and it is very possible that the piracy complained of by Strabo as occurring from these places was indeed carried out by the Abazins.”*<sup>7</sup>

As we can see, P.S. Pallas primarily discusses the Abazin(ian)s, who, in his opinion, were the indigenous inhabitants of the North-western Caucasus, previously occupying more extensive territories. Thus, Badri Gogia attributes to P.S. Pallas something he did not say. It should not be forgotten that Abkhazia is located in the north-western part of the Western Caucasus.

In the academic world, the fact of the migration of the Abazin(ian)s to the North Caucasus from Abkhazia in two waves has long been established; initially, the carriers of the modern T’ap’anta dialect migrated, followed by the Ashkharatsy (aka *Ashkharywa*).

Regarding this, 18th-century documents recorded the following: *“the third minor part of the Abkhaz(ian) people is that which, in the previous century, crossed to the northern side of the mountains.”*<sup>8</sup>; *“behind them lies the district called Besskesesk Abaza; its inhabitants migrated from Abaza and came under the protection of the Circassians.”*<sup>9</sup>

Such information can be found in many historical materials of past centuries. For example, in the second half of the 20th century, Sergej Anisimov wrote: *“In the 17th century, part of the Abkhaz(ian) people crossed to the northern slope of the Main Caucasus Range, into the valleys of rivers that are left tributaries of the Kuban. Here they were named Abazi or Abazins and live to this day, though in a very small number.”*<sup>10</sup>

Georgian historian A. Gugushvili writes: *“About the seventeenth century part of the Abkhazians crossed into the mountains of the Kuban (now the Krasnodar) region, on the northern slopes of the Caucasus range, where they still live under the name of Abazins.”*<sup>11</sup>

Doctor of Historical Sciences, archaeologist E.P. Alexeeva writes: *“In the 13th-14th centuries, there began a mass-migration of Abazin(ian)s to the North Caucasus, which continued until the 17th century inclusive. The Tapantas were the first to relocate, followed by the Shkaraovtsy (Ashkharywas). By the middle of the 17th century, in the upper reaches of the Kuban and Zelenchuk, as well as in the Pjatigor’e area, five subdivisions of Abazin-Tapantas lived: the Looovtsy, Biberdovtsy, Dudarukovtsy, Klychevtsy, and Dzhantemirovtsy. From the Shkaraovtsy subdivisions, the Bagovtsy and Kyzylbekovtsy resided here. It seems that the migration of the Shkaraovtsy to the North Caucasus continued into the second half of the 17th century. In 18th-century sources, all six Shkaraovtsy subdivisions are mentioned in the North Caucasus — Tam, Kizilbek, Bag, Chegrej, and Masylbaj-Bashilbaj.”*<sup>12</sup>

Researcher V.A. Kuznetsov, drawing on various historical sources, reported: *“Approximately in the 14th-15th centuries, an ethnic group belonging to the Abkhazians, the Abaza-*

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<sup>7</sup> The Caucasus: European Diaries of the 13th—18th Centuries / Compiled by V. Atalikov. Nalchik, 2010, pp.260-261

<sup>8</sup> Historical and Geographical Calendar for the Year 1779. St. Petersburg, 1779, p.159.

<sup>9</sup> Glovani Xaverio. Description of Circassia in 1724. Tiflis, 1893, p.8.

<sup>10</sup> Anisimov S.S. The Abkhaz Alps. Moscow, 1930, p.20.

<sup>11</sup> Gugushvili A. - Caucasia and the Caucasus. Journal of The Royal Central Asian Society, 2011, p.183.

<sup>12</sup> Issues of the Ethnic History of the Peoples of Karachay-Cherkessia. Cherkessk, 1980, p.49.

*Abazin(ian)s (apparently part of the Abazg(ian)s), migrated to the North Caucasus, receiving the name 'Tapanta,' which in Ossetian sounds like 'plain dwellers'. Following them, another Abkhaz(ian) group, the 'Shkharawa', moved to the north of the Caucasus. They formed the modern Abazin(ian) people of the North Caucasus, having Abkhazian origins. The region of Abaza is mentioned in connection with Timur's campaign through the North Caucasus by the Persian author of the early 15th century, Nizam ad-Din Shami. Thus, a part of the Abkhaz(ian) ethnic group found itself in the North Caucasus surrounded by Adyghe tribes."*<sup>13</sup>

Today, in the academic community studying the history of the Western Caucasus, there is no doubt about the migration of the Abazin(ian)s to the North Caucasus from the territory of Abkhazia, which is supported by written, archaeological, and linguistic data.

Badri Gogia: "***Due to the lack of ancient history of the Abkhazians contemporary with him, Gifford Palgrave in 1876 was reluctant to believe in the autochthony of the Abkhazians and wrote: 'They know they are Abkhazians and nothing more.'***"

**Our comments:** Here, Badri Gogia mentions William Gifford Palgrave, who was an officer of British intelligence, a traveller, and a member of the Jesuit order. His work, "Essays on Eastern Questions", is little known to the Abkhazian public due to the lack of translations into Abkhaz or Russian. The eighth chapter of this work is dedicated to Abkhazia and the Abkhazians, specifically about the Abkhazian uprising in 1877. However, the absence of a translation does not prevent familiarity with this work in the original. We have specially prepared a translation and will present the full excerpt discussing the history and origins of the Abkhazians. One imagines that Abkhazian readers too would be interested in what the English intelligence officer wrote:

*"Of the early history of the Abkhasian race little is known, and little was probably to be known. More than two thousand years since we find them, in Greek records, inhabiting the narrow strip between the mountains and the sea, along the central eastern coast of the Euxine, precisely where later records and the maps of our own day place them. But whence these seeming autochthons arrived, what was the cradle of their infant race, to which of the great 'earth-families' (in the German phrase), this little tribe, the highest number of which can never have much exceeded a hundred thousand, belonged, are questions on which the past and the present are alike silent. Tall stature, fair complexion, light eyes, auburn hair, and a great love for active and athletic sport, might seem to assign them a Northern origin; but an Oriental regularity of feature, and a language which, though it bears no discoverable affinity to any known, dialect, has yet the Semitic post-fixes, and in guttural richness distances the purest Arabic or Hebrew, would appear to claim for them a different relationship. Their character, too, brave, enterprising, and commercial in its way, has yet very generally a certain mixture of childish cunning, and a total deficiency of organising power, that cement of nations, which removes them from European and even from Turkish resemblance, while it recalls the so-called Semitic of south-western Asia. But no tradition on their part lays claims to the solution of their mystery, and records are wanting among a people who have never committed their vocal sounds to writing; they know that they are Abkhasians, and nothing more."*<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Kuznetsov V.A. Introduction to Caucasian Studies. Vladikavkaz, 2004. pp.16-17.

<sup>14</sup> W. G. Palgrave. Essays on Eastern Questions. London. 1827. p.256.

This passage provides a fascinating insight into the complex origins and identity of the Abkhazian people, as perceived in historical texts and through the lens of early researchers. It highlights the intricate blend of characteristics that defy simple categorisation, reflecting the diverse influences and the enigmatic past of the Abkhazians.

As can be noted, W.G. Palgrave had no doubts about the autochthony of the Apswas (Abkhazians) in the territory of Abkhazia and, on the contrary, asserts that Greek sources mentioned them 2000 years ago, and that later chroniclers place them in the same location, i.e., in the territory of modern Abkhazia. He also concludes that the roots of the Apswas (Abkhazians) trace back to the territory of the Ancient East. Here, on the part of Badri Gogia, there is a blatant falsification of the history of the Abkhazian people and an attempt to attribute to the English traveller and intelligence officer what he never wrote. The also mentioned Arcangelo Lamberti and Jean Chardin did not provide any information about the origin of the Abkhazian people; they merely recorded a period of reconquest in the history of Abkhazia in the 17th century, with which Badri Gogia and some Georgian "specialists" are clearly unfamiliar, as they apparently read (and especially analyse) narrative sources on the history of Abkhazia very badly.

We would like to recall that as early as 1938, a manuscript from the beginning of the 15th century entitled "Libellus de Notitia Orbis. Ioannes De Galonifontibus" was published in Latin. In 1978, in the academic journal "Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae," Hungarian translator Lajos Tardy published an article titled "Caucasian Peoples and Their Neighbours in 1404", which was a translation of that 15th-century manuscript. The manuscript belongs to Archbishop John of Golonifontibus, who lived in the East for a long time, was well informed about the peoples of the Caucasus, and provided interesting data about them, including the Abkhazians, and this is what he reported: "...Abkhazia, a small, hilly country. It has sufficient animals and good wine. They do not consume bread or wheat, they do not even have them, they cook pounded millet in earthen vessels, without salt and that is what they eat instead of bread...They do not care for the matters of the soul, in religion they follow the Georgians. They have their own language."<sup>15</sup>

This passage reveals a vivid snapshot of Abkhazia in the early 15th century, emphasising its unique cultural and agricultural practices, as well as its linguistic and religious affiliations, further contributing to the complex mosaic of its identity.

It seems that comments here are superfluous.

One could analyse each mentioned material further, but it appears sufficient as it is. These examples show that Badri Gogia's article on the history of Abkhazia is clearly of a falsifying nature, has nothing in common with historical scholarship, and is of no value.

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<sup>15</sup> Tardy Lajos. The Caucasian Peoples and their neighbours in 1404. Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae, Tomus XXXII. Budapest. 1878. pp.93-94.

## Sources and Literature.

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This list of sources and literature indicates a broad and diverse basis for the study of the history and culture of Abkhazia and the Caucasus region, spanning from ancient to modern times and including perspectives from both local and foreign scholars. The inclusion of works from various centuries and disciplines underlines the complexity and depth of the historical narrative surrounding Abkhazia, contrasting sharply with the unsubstantiated claims presented in the criticised article.