

# The toponym "Batumi" – Etymology

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## Abstract

Interest in Georgian cities arose in the second half of the 19th century. Active scientific research began in the middle of the 20th century. Various monographs and works were dedicated to Georgian cities, including Batumi. The aim of our research is to determine the etymology of the toponym "Batumi" and the motivation behind the name. Researchers in geography, ethnography, history, and other fields often use toponyms for research purposes. On the other hand, linguists also often need geographical, ethnographic, or historical data to explain toponyms. The aim of our research is to determine the etymology of the toponym "Batumi." Several hypotheses exist regarding the origin of the name in Kartvelian studies. Some suggest that it derives from the Greek, while others propose it originates from Turkish or other Kartvelian languages. There are several explanations for the etymology of "batumi." Each of them is subject to scientific consideration and, of course, has the right to exist. We have been trying to identify this plant for the last ten years. In our opinion, the toponym "Batumi" is a phytotoponym derived from the name of a plant, the name of which is confirmed today only in folk oral speech or folklore, although the local population no longer remembers it and future generations will no longer know it. Below, we present our research regarding the mentioned phytotoponym.

**Keywords:** Batumi, Toponym, Phytonym, Etymology, Chakvi grass.

## Introduction

The collection and study of Georgian toponymy have a long tradition. Ancient Georgian geographical names are preserved in ancient Georgian literary-historical writings, which contain important information about the name of this or that geographical point. However, despite this, Vakhushti Bagrationi (1690–1770), an outstanding historian and geographer of the 18th century, is considered the founder of the scientific study of Georgian onomastics.

Linguists have long paid attention to the importance of toponymy for dialectological research, especially historical dialectology. The study of the toponymy of Adjara is a necessary task for the study of the Adjarian dialect as well as the past existence, history, and ethnography of this region.

## Methods and Materials

Based on the goals of the study, we initially searched for scientific literature and notes from travellers and researchers about the toponym Batumi.

During the search process, through comparison with scientific literature, we critically approached existing scientific views. Through scientifically based research and interpretation, we have drawn relevant, reliable conclusions. When working on the article, we were also guided by the methods of historical-comparative analysis and synthesis.

## Results

Batumi, known as the city of the past, dates back to approximately 400 BC, as mentioned by Jean Moreau [1]. According to T. Kauhchishvili's research, the first written record about Batum is attributed to Aristotle (4th century BC) [2]. It is also possible that Batum was mentioned by Plinius (1st century AD). The second Roman author is Ariane (2nd century AD), who, like Plinius, travelled along the coasts of Kolkheti and Kartli and mentions the river "Batis" [3]. It should be noted that Plinius also mentions the point of the same name.

This point was also named by the anonymous author of the 5th century and later by the Byzantine historian Michael Panaretos [4]. K. Muller equates the point "Tabula Peutingeriana" with "Portus Altus" on the Roman road map with Batumi, which is located on the site of modern Batumi [5]. S. Kauhchishvili considered it the Latin form of the Greek "Batis" [6]. This identification was shared by I. Sikharulidze and D. Braund [7] and [8].

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"Megale Polis" ("Great City"), "Tabula Peutingeriana," and "Portus Altus," aka Batumi, are mentioned in the Chronicle of Easter (7th century AD). Academician S. Kaukhchishvili identifies them with "Batumi." Some researchers share the opinion that early Batumi was located at the mouth of the Koroli River. [9]. Vakhushiti Batonishvili notes in his work that Batumi was located on the coast of the Black Sea, which was a small, beautiful city conquered by the Ottomans [10]. On European nautical maps, Batumi is indicated by cartographic marks denoting a fortress town and is mentioned on various European maps, such as 13th-century Venetian and 14th-century Italian compass maps, namely, Visconte 1318, Pizzigani 1367, and Gracizo Benicaza. (1480), and Jakobo Gastoldi (1561) showed a sailing ship near Batumi on the map, which indicated that it was an important port city [11]. In 1426, the German traveller Hans Schiltberg, in his "travel book," called Batumi the main city [12]. In addition, in 1472, the Italian diplomat and traveller Iosafat Barbaro mentions Batumi as a city where "Kolkhuri Tetri" spread as "Colchicam ivitam." This indicates that Batumi is a beautiful city on the coast. Venice's ambassador to Persia, Ambrogio Contarini, who visited Batumi in 1474, refers to it as a fortress city [13]. In 1615, the missionary Louis Grange named Batumi a strategic centre, a harbour monopoly, a

Batumi), and the sea port, the centre of the trade monopoly and the residence of the strategists, was in Batumi. residence of strategists, and especially a seaport [14].

S.Kaukhchishvili notes that the Petra fortress was in Tsikhisdziri (Tsikhisdziri is a place near Batumi).

In recent years, notable attention has been drawn to the history of Batumi in our scientific literature. This attention dates back to the 6th century, when it was mentioned in historical sources as the localization of 'Petra,' a significant Black Sea coastal Lazic city. Interestingly, during the 6th century, the classical sources do not mention Petra as part of Batumi, but it is emphasized as a key centre on the Black Sea coast, where significant Byzantine-Sasanian wars took place. Authors from Byzantium, Procopius of Caesarea, and Agathias Scholasticus provide us with detailed information about these events. The history of Batumi as a settled area begins with Gori. It has been a city settlement since the 2nd–6th centuries AD [15].

The archaeological findings on the territory of Batumi provide various ceramic materials from the ancient period. The importance of these urbanized settlements in the hill Gora-samosaxlo region was significant, which contributed to trade and economic cooperation with the centres of antiquity. Imported ceramics, such as Khios, Samos, Tazos, and Amforiani, and local ceramics, including Colchian pottery, have been found. According to N. Berdzenishvili, there was a well-established ancient Colchian village in the territory of present-day Batumi. The research suggests the presence of ancient graves with Fen-style burial from the early centuries (Inner Chorokhi II), which closely resemble the constructions used in Petra's citadel (the remains of Petra in Chorokhi, near the Chakvi [16]). This text discusses the historical significance of Batumi in Georgia and its connections to the ancient city of Petra.

There are several attempts to explain the etymology of the toponym "Batumi". Each of them is the result of some judgment and, of course, is worthy of existence. According to the data of Kartvelian languages, for the first time Acad. S. Kaukhchishvili tried to explain the meaning of the toponym Batumi. In it, the researcher separated the "Um" suffix and the "Bat" base material. This opinion was supported by researchers: T. Mibchvani, J. Chkheidze, A. Inaishvili, M. Qaldani. [17-20].

The hypothesis of its origin in Greek was supported by Professor Z. Chumburidze, but he did not rule out that it derives from some Georgian word. It is also known that the Greeks referred to the place near Novorossiysk as Bati, Batea, or Bata, but a similar toponym was not created there. One circumstance should be taken into account: often two names of this or that toponym, ethnonym, or hydronym are known in the sources: one is named by locals, the other by foreigners. Some examples of this are Rion, Fasis; Chorokhi, Akampsis; Korolistavi, Batis. T. Kaukhchishvili draws attention to a similar fact. Kaukhchishvili discusses the writings of Joseph Flavius: Joseph Flavius often mentions two names of tribes: one is what they were called according to Ethnarchos, and the other is what the Hellenes called the same tribe: Gomars, Galatians, Magogs, Scythians, and Midians (T. Kaukhchishvili, 1983). Are not we dealing with the same event in Batumi? Researcher I. Chkhonia writes in his dictionary that Batumi means a swampy place or land with the meaning of swamp [21]. In addition, the root "bat" is not alien to Georgian surnames and proper names, for example, Bati, Bata, Bataya, Batia, Batadze, and Batiashvili [22].

The main hypothesis of S. Kaukhchishvili is correct, that the Greek word "Petra" is translated as Georgian "bat", "stone" or "rock". This is because "bat" or "kara" means stone or rock in Georgian languages [M. Qaldan, 1982.]. It should be noted that from the given definition it is clear that in the

Georgian language "Batumi" was associated with such geographical features as rocks or stones. It is also necessary to emphasize that "Petra" is considered to have the same meaning, because the word "Bat|Bakh" in Svanur meant "rock", and the term "Petra" in Old Georgian meant stone or rock. In addition, an attempt is made to explain Batumi based on Georgian languages; The um suffix was also distinguished in the analysis material [23]. It is conceivable that Batumi with its variants should not have originally been the name of a river [hydronym], but a geographical name [toponym] of a place. Researcher R. Gordeziani notes that in the name "Batomi" // "Batumi" the -um/-om maker is separated, and "Bat" is the root. We think that in our particular case we are dealing with a variation of this suffix [24]. Researcher M. Faghava also identified the -um suffix in the toponym "Batumi" and considered that -um and -om suffixes form geographical names from phytonymic roots [25]. Several toponyms of phytonymic origin have been confirmed near Batumi: „Bartskhana”, which means a grove, and Prickly place („Bartskhvari”). The researcher G. Bedoshvili develops the same opinion [26-27].

We will consider the toponym of Batumi together with the names of geographically adjacent places. These are "Kaprasa", "Kapreshumi", "Beshura" and Beshumi). Such toponyms are mentioned in the neighborhood of the main toponym "Batumi" (cf. Batura"-Batumi), as a result of the study of ethnographic material in Georgian mythology, it was determined that the cross and icon are not traditional attributes. But objects of worship related to the cosmic and astral worldview and sacred trees. In ancient Georgia there was a cult of trees and animals [28]. The sacred tree, like several other anthropomorphic beings, was transformed into more anthropomorphic forms and became an object. Characteristics of a Worshipped or Incarnated Animal or Plant [29] From the history of religion, it is known that man-made objects passed from earth to heaven, and during earthly life they hierarchically embodied social forces and institutions (god, king, ruler), priest, evil, good).[30] It is known that in 1927 the famous linguist V. Topuria discovered Svan manuscripts about Elbatur, notes that there is a legend (Svan texts) about the mythological village of Elbatur. Tsalanar. , II: 174). Another famous person in Ossetian ethnography is Amiran's double, the proud Batradzi, who falls into the water (river) and dies, and three towers appear from his tears [31]. According to another version, the grass on the river bank grows on these tears. Sometimes a fat person is also called Batura. Batura is also the name of a dog. In folk traditions, especially in poetry, the plant "Batura" can be found in Zoidze's poetry (see poet Sh. Zoidze's "Ballad"). The poet also lists the names of field grasses: "Korkotina", "Moloka", "Kelaptara" and "Batura". The distinct meanings of the lexeme "Bαθvs \ Batus" in Ancient Greek are recorded [32], with several meanings: 1. deep, 2. high and 3. fertile. It has three such different semantics. al. In Makashvili's "Botanical Lexicon" there is a Latin word: "Caprea", which is related to the Svan "Bagvra" and the Migrelian "Katujvar". According to botanist Natela Varshanidze, the Latin term is "Pollinia imberbis", and its synonym is "Microstengium vimeneum", which translates as "bamboo grass" (bamboo is a sacred tree in mythology). In Guria it is called "Pur-Pura", "Barbatsa", in Adjara "Bambuka", and in Samegrelo it is called "Tea Mafatia"(Chaishi mafatia). [33].

"Chakvi grass" is an annual weed. It is a plant that grows to a height of 40-80 cm. It has long, pinnate leaves that are toothed and compound. Its leaves are lanceolate and about 5-10 cm long. Its stems root easily when in contact with the soil, so it is very fertile. It is characterized by abundant fertility. It especially likes moist, shady places. Chakvi grass, aka bamboo grass ("bambuka"), is a fairly common plant in Chakvi, Green Cape, Makhinjauri and Batumi, only on the coastal plain, on the surrounding slopes, in gardens and parks (Fig. 1).



*Figure 1. "Pebble grass", bamboo, "bambuka"*

In our opinion, this is a weed grass, the name of which is confirmed today only in folk speech and folklore. The next generation does not know him. The local population no longer remembers this plant by this name. This is our attempt to explain the etymology of the toponym Batumi.

### **conclusion**

In our opinion, the etymology of the toponym "Batumi" is related to the plant "Batura", which today is actually only found in folklore and word of mouth (see, for example, the poem "Balada" by the poet Sh. Zoidze), although today the local population no longer remembers this phytonym - Batura. "Batura" as a plant is not known by the future generation. For the etiology of this toponym, the motivation for its name may be due to the widespread distribution of the aforementioned plant, which still thrives in abundance in the area today.

### **Competing interests**

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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