




Geographical Area of Meskheta According to the Ottoman Records of the XVI-XIX Centuries

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Abstract

A certain part of the territory of Georgia was described in the Ottoman Defters of the Middle Ages. This is quite a large territory, which includes not only modern, but also historical Georgia. The aim of the research is the geo-informational cartography of the Georgian cultural heritage according to the Ottoman Defters of the XVI-XIX centuries and showing the geographical area that was described in these records. From this point of view, 9 defters were processed and analyzed. As research has shown, these defters include the territories of Georgia that the Ottomans: 1) only conquered and tributed; 2) it was conquered and could not be fully preserved and today it is in modern Georgia and 3) it was conquered and it is still within the borders of Turkey. Some parts of the depicted areas in the defters covering each other's. Their detection is important for studying the dynamics of social-economical, traditional natural management, onomastic and a number of other issues. However, the territorial overlaps are not so large. For example, the defters of 1574 and 1595, both of which describe the province of Gurjistan, coincide only in a small fragment. The 1574 defter of big Artan livas territorially coincides with the 1595 big Artan and Fanak livas.

Keywords: Ottoman records, historical Georgia, Meskheta, Gurjistan

Introduction

Ottoman defters of the Middle Ages (XVI-XIX centuries) contain valuable information not only about the social-economic situation of the Ottomans but also about the countries conquered by them. In these defters, a certain part of the territory of Georgia is described, which is quite a large area. Within Meskheta, it includes not only the territories of modern (Samtskhe, Javakheti, Adjara), but also the territories of historical Georgia (Artan, Erusheti, Klarjeti, Kola, Tao, Shavsheti), the basins of the upper Mtkvari and the middle Chorokhi rivers and their tributaries.

According to the defters, a certain part of the works was dedicated to the research of the territories conquered by the Ottomans (Jikia, 1958; Nikolaishvili et al., 2021; Shashikadze, 2006; Shengelia, 1960; Svanidze, 1984). However, this issue has not yet been fully studied and analyzed. The issue of the territorial coverage of political/administrative units of different ranks depicted in the defters is particularly unclear. The low level of study of the mentioned issue is due not only to the fact that only a small part of these documents has been translated into Georgian today but also to the fact that these documents have not been studied in various aspects, even from a geographical point of view. With a few exceptions (Aslanikashvili, 1953; NikolaiShvili et al., 2021), nor were they fully mapped cartographically. Due to these reasons, the geographical area of the political/administrative units depicted in the books and the tendency of their transformation over time are unknown. And if this area is determined, it will give us the opportunity to:

- To avoid the mistake of considering different administrative units, which have the same name in different periods of time, as the same territory. An example of this is the province of Gurjistan, which in the records of 1574 and 1595, with some exceptions, includes a different territory.
- To carry out a social-economic analysis of different administrative units, on the one hand, by comparing the conquered territories and, on the other hand, the unconquered Georgian parts, in

order to make possible a retrospective analysis of the unified situation of the settlement of the Georgian nation.

- To determine the dynamic change of the Georgian substrate through the study of traditional natural management, toponymical, anthroponymical and a number of other issues, i.e. the process of transition to the "Ottoman rule" or, on the contrary, the process of preserving the Georgian substrate.

Therefore, it is very important to determine the territorial coverage of the political/administrative units recorded in the Ottoman records. The present work deals with this problematic issue.

The aim of the research is to determine the geographical area described by the Georgian translations of the Ottoman records of the 16th and 19th centuries.

Methods and Materials

The main research method is retrospective cartography and comparative geographical analysis by using GIS technologies. Accordingly, the data in the databases were identified, systematized, and classified, and a GIS database was created. Identification of objects was carried out on the basis of mutual agreement with other sources, for which comparative, semantic, retrospective cartography, and other methods of research were used. A field-expeditional research was also conducted within the borders of modern Georgia (Adjara, Samtskhe-Javakheti) and the Republic of Turkey (Artvin and Artan provinces). The field research was mainly based on surveys and questionnaires of the local population.

Obviously, field research could not be carried out completely on the entire studying area because it required a lot of time and money. Therefore, the field work was carried out on such a scale that a modern picture of the facts recorded in the old defters could be presented in general terms. The fact that a significant part of the data is kept in archival funds of other countries (Russia, Turkey, Romania, Bulgaria and others) with limited access, so this fact also created some difficulty.

The object of our research was 9 Ottoman defters:

1. Grand and Short Defters of Ajara Liva of 1566-1574.
2. The Grand Defter of Gurjistan Vilayet of 1574.
3. The Grand Defter of Gurjistan Vilayet of 1595.
4. The Grand Defter of Artanudji of 1595.
5. Jaba Defter of Childir Vilayet of 1694-1732.
6. Grand Defter of Tbilisi Vilayet of 1728.
7. Defter of Shavsheti of 1835-1836.
8. Defter of Machakheli (Crdili Vilayet) of 1836.
9. Defter of Sateleli Liva (Crdili Vilayet) of 1836.

In the Ottoman defters are recorded just conquered territories by the Ottomans, because conquered territories were described in order to impose taxes on them. Naturally, this conquest did not happen all at once. The Ottomans had separated Georgia from some side or part of it, and then Georgia had taken some of them back. During the years, these territories were lost again with new invasions. Due to the frequent change of the political owner, it is impossible to restore an exact sequence picture. Because Defters depicted exact moments, it became possible to present a general picture for certain periods of time.

As the analysis and comparison of historiographic works and Ottoman defters had shown, according to the Ottoman power, the territory of Georgia can be divided into three parts, namely, the territories that the Ottomans: 1) marched and conquered (but did not manage to completely conquer). Their political subjugation lasted for a certain period. Such is the western, the largest part of Georgia); 2) They were conquered for a certain period of time, but they could not keep it and today it is within the borders of modern Georgia. Such is Eastern Georgia and 3) conquered and incorporated these territories (such is the largest part of southwestern Georgia in the basin of the Mtkvari and Chorokhi rivers).

The Ottoman influence was less on the territories that were directly separated from Georgia, which was not conquered by the Ottomans. This mainly concerns the northern part of Samtskhe-Saatabago (Samtskhe, the northern part of Javakheti, Adjara, Shavsheti, Klarjeti), which is within the borders of modern Georgia. As for the rest of Samtskhe-Saatabago, located further south (Kola, Artan, Erusheti, Artanuji, etc.), the Ottoman influence was much more here (Nikolaishvili et. al., 2021).

Our research includes the territory of Meskheta, incorporated by the Ottomans. Part of this territory is located in modern Georgia, and another part is in Turkey.

From the historiography, it is known that within Meskheta were located: Artaani, Erusheti, Klarjeti, Oltisi, Samtskhe, Speri, Tao, Potskhovi, Shavsheti, Javakheti, and others. But there are also parts whose territorial affiliation is debatable and needs some clarification, for example, Borjomi Valley, Kaikuli, and Chaneti.

Ivane Javakhishvili wrote that Georgia consisted of several "countries", whose names and borders had been changed over time, which was the result of political-national growth, but still there were permanent, native borders of each country. We investigate only those borders and territory that are included in the "permanent" borders of Meskheta. According to the latest studies, the "permanent" borders of Meskheta include: Soeri (upper river of Chorokhi), Tao (middle river of Chorokhi with right and left tributaries: Parkhalistskali, Tortomi, Oltis), Klarjet-Shavsheti and Adjara (lower river of Chorokhi), Kola, Artaani, Erusheti, Javakheti (incl. Ninotsminda, Akhalkalaki, Aspindze municipalities), Samtskhe and Potskhovi valleys (incl. Akhaltsikhe and Adigeni municipalities), Tori (Borjomi municipality) and others. (Abashidze et al., 2014).

According to the Ottoman defters of 1728, Tori, so Borjomi valley, is in Gori Liva, although it, together with Shida Kartli, did not experience the same long-term influence of Ottoman rule as Samtskhe and other parts of Georgia conquered by the Ottomans. But it is also known that the border of South Georgia started from Tashiskar and extended to the south. It is the same with the modern administrative division. Therefore, it was included in our research.

Chaneti, also known as Lazeti, was a bordering region of Meskheta. Politically, in a certain period, he was included in its area. Lazeti became one of the first incorporated parts of Georgia by the Ottomans. Moreover, if we trust Vakhushti Bagrationi, Meskheta extended to the borders of Chaneti (Vakhushti Bagrationi, 1941). We find a similar opinion in many scientific works. Therefore, it could not be included in our research.

Adjara was also a part of Meskheta, but Batumi and Kobuleti sides were not included in it. Today, Kobuleti is a part of the Autonomous Republic of Adjara, although in the Middle Ages this area was part of the Guria, which was captured by the Ottomans. The population was converted to Islam and separated from Guria.

Kaikuli is mentioned in historical sources as Abotsi. It is reported in the defters of 1728. Due to the change of the political situation, it sometimes belonged to Kartli and sometimes to Meskheta. Ivane Javakhishvili had mentioned that Kaikuli was in Meskheta, but he also noticed that it was in the south of Javakheti. There was a community located between Meskheta and Kvemo Kartli, and sometimes it belonged to Meskheta, but often, in particular, in the XVII-XVIII centuries, it was within the borders of Kvemo Kartli. (Javakhishvili, 1998). However, there are different opinions; in particular, V. Nozadze marked that Kaikuli was in Meskheta (Nozadze, 1989). As for Pavle Ingorokva, when he discusses the issue of the territorial dispute between Georgia and Armenia, he says that Abotsi (the same as Kaikuli) belongs to Georgia and adds that Abotsi is geographically located between the districts of Meskheta and Bambak [Ingorokva, manuscript].

Here, we should emphasize one important physical-geographic circumstance (Nikolaishvili et al., 2021). Historically, it is known that Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli are bordered by an important orographic barrier—the Javakheti ridge. Today, the northern part of the Javakheti ridge, which is located in Georgia, is a main orographic border. Therefore, due to orographic conditions, Abotsi belongs more to Kvemo Kartli than to Javakheti.

Based on the above, the geographical area of our research is limited to the historical territory of Meskheta, or the "natural border", which was spread from Tashiskar to Karnukalaki, but did not include Kaikul (Abots), Chanet (Lazet), nor Batumi and Kobuleti.

Results

According to the "defters of the Province of Gurjistan" of 1574 and 1595, the province of Gurjistan included the basins of the upper Mtkvari and the middle of the Chorokhi rivers. In particular, the right side of Chorokhi with tributaries (Oltissistskal, Banisistskal, Bardusistskal, Sevristsiskal, Torthomistskal, Artanujitskal). The upper part of Mtkvari was surrounded by the vilayet on both sides. According to the "defters of the Province of Gurjistan" in 1574, the province of Gurjistan was divided into 4 parts: Artanuji, Great Artaan, Tortomi and Oltis. A total of 19 Nahie were united in the vilayet. According to the 1595 "defters of the Province of Gurjistan", there are 9 livas and 41 Nahie named in the province, although S. Jikhia also writes that Oltis Liwa is a later inscription (The Grand Defter of Gurjistan Vilayet of 1595, 1941), i.e. It does not belong to the 1595 register.

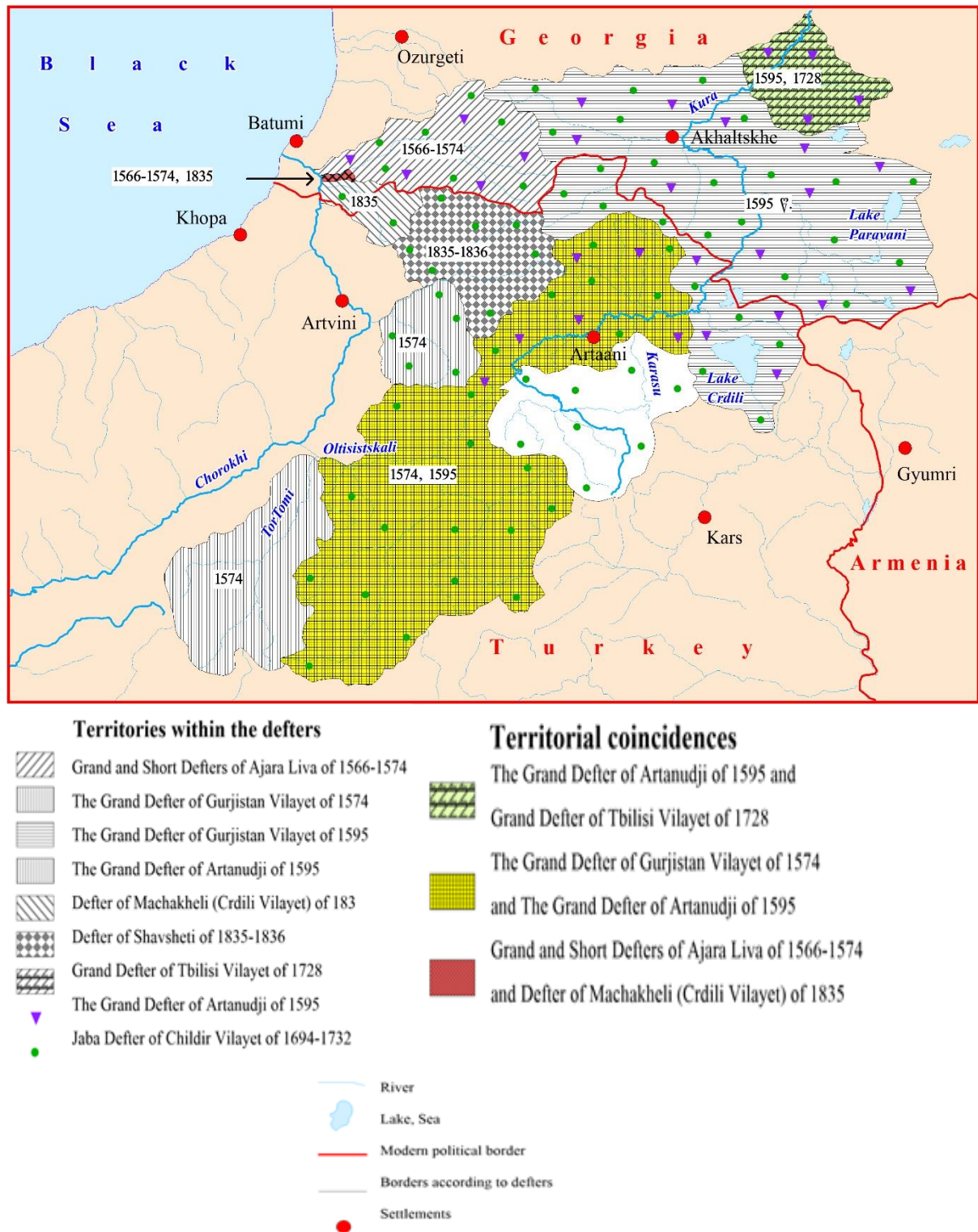


Figure 2. Geographical area of Meskheti according to Ottoman defters (XVI-XIX centuries)

Table 1. Administrative arrangement of provinces of Georgia According to the records of 1574 and 1595

Livas	Nahiye	livas	Nahiye
Big Artaani *	Mzvare *	Big Artaani *	Mzvare *
	Mishe *		Tkiani *
	Chrdili *		Chrdili *
	Kiamkhisi *	Fanak *	Kiamkhisi *
	Fanaki *		Fanak *
	Panaskerti *		Panaskerti *
Tortomi	Tortomi	Akhalkalaki	Akshehiri
	Kudrusuri		Tmogvi
	Pertegreki		Nialisvure
Oltisi	Anzavi	Akhalsikhe	Aspindza
	Bardisi		Atskuri
	Gobi		Mzvare
	Marsasori		Okroscikhe
	Mzvari		Otskhi
	Chrdili		Ude
Artanudji	Artanudji		Kvabliani
	Ishkhani		Chrdili
	Taoskari		Djadjaraki
	Khacheni		
		Petre	Petre
			Kashveti
		Potskhovi	Mzvare
			Chrdili
		Chrdili	Mgeltsikhe
			Kanarbeli
			Djanbazi
		Khertvisi	Buzmareti
			Forest Djavakheti
			Khertvisi

Matches are marked with an asterisk (*)

The mutual comparison of administrative units showed us that the province of Gurjistan, according to the 1574 and 1595 records, did not have the same territorial coverage, and only on a small fragment they coincided territorially (pic. 1): Didi Artani Liva of the 1574 record (districts: Mzvare, Mishe, Sheti, Kiamkhisi, Fanaki, Fanaskert) territorially coincides with the 1595 Livas of Didi Artan (Nahiyes: Mzvare, Tgiani, Shiti) and Fanak (Nahiyes: Kiamkhisi, Fanak, Fanaskerti) (Table 1). This means that in the 20-year period, there was more division of administrative units—didi artan liwa was divided into Didi artaan and fanak livas—but there was no more division of lower-ranking administrative units—nahiyes. The total area of this contiguous territory was 3353 square meters. It's not a big area. If we compare modern Georgia, it is slightly larger than the municipality of Mestia.

As for the "Short (Ijmal) Defter of Childir Vilayet" (XVI century) and "Jaba Defter", the available information about the administrative arrangement of the Vilayet is very scarce. The reason for this is that it is compiled based on a big database and contains brief information. It should be determined for which large books they are compiled. According to the current sources, it is impossible to give an exact answer to this question. Moreover, there are later inscriptions in defter, which the Georgian translators date from 1590 to 1622 ("[Ijm. David.](#)", p. 5). We can only make assumptions, namely, the Ottoman notebooks of the same period are connected to each other, and the data entered in the short notebooks should not belong to one notebook. Obviously, it is difficult to generalize this to all Ottoman books, although it is confirmed by the books we have. What gives us the opportunity to say that? First of all, the "Short (Ijmal) Defter of Chrdili Province" and "Short Defter" include villages from 1595 and the extensive Defter of Livy of Zemo Adjara (Tab. 2).

Table 2. Compliance of some villages according to different defters

Short list of Childir Vilayet		1595 Great defters of the Province of Gurjistan		Wide defters of Zemo Adjara	
Villages	Sum of taxes	Villages	Sum of taxes	Villages	Sum of taxes

Zarzma	11 600	Sersem(?)	11 600		
Tsaghveri	15 200	Tsaghveri	15 200		
Samda Sakhuri	13 000	Samzisokhevi	13 000		
Handakiri/Hakidi	30 000	?	30 000		
Ghordjomi	29 999			Ghordjomi	2999 *
Dabagha akhra	15 000			Big Adjara	15 000
Doskho	15 002			Potskho	15 002
Alme	29 999			Alme	2 999 *

* – probably, we have to deal with incorrect data collection

"Jaba defter of the chrdili Province" 1694-1732. It is a different type of document from the large (extensive) and short records, which records the changes in the lands (Khasi, Ziameti, Timari) granted by the Sultan. All material is arranged by geographical point, not chronologically. There is information about the following lives of Akhaltsikhe Sapasha (Chrdili Province): Artanuji, Akhaltsikhe, Akhalkalaki, Adjara, Great Artaan, Small Artaan, Mamirvan, Oltis, Livana, Fanak, Potskhovi, Fertekreki, Chrdili (Childiri), Shavsheti, and Khertvisi. Moreover, Peter's Liva is not verified in the Chrdili Vilayet. This is explained by the fact that with the truce of 1639, this area (from Kvishkheti to Atskuri, i.e. Borjomi valley) no longer belongs to Ottomans and is still part of the Kartli Kingdom ["Jaba Davtar", p. 81].

It is interesting how to belong the small Artaani to the province of Livy, i.e., the Chrdili of Kola. This issue is unclear due to the fact that the same nahiyas (Khojevan, Sheti, Mzvare) of the mentioned Livy, often with the same villages, are included in both defters of Chrdili and Karsi. This strange case wasn't considered a chancellery mistake by Abuladze. the "double" affiliation is also confirmed by the report of Katib Chelebi ("[Jaba Davtari](#)", p. 72). Today it is very difficult to explain how the same administrative unit was managed by different governorates. Today it is very difficult to explain how the same administrative unit was managed by different governorates. This issue can be resolved by finding new records; however, in our case, the territorial affiliation of the small Artaan Liv, or Kola, was determined by the Chrdili province.

According to the big defter (XVI century) of the Upper Adjara Liva, this one included almost the entire basin of Achariskali (middle and upper parts). Administratively, it was divided into two nahiyas: Zemo and Kvemo Adjara. The territory of Liva mostly coincides with the borders of modern administrative units (Shuakhevi and Khulo municipalities), although there are differences between them. In particular, the eastern border of Liva had passed on the top of the Arsian ridge, and the upper part of Kvabliani and Ghrmanistskali did not enter within the border. (as well as modern Adjara) (Nikolaishvili & Sartania, 2011).

Even in the short story of Adjara Liva (XVI century) there are only reports about the nahiyas of Kvemo and Kvemo Adjara. It seems that, territorially, it coincides with the data of the extensive defter of Livy of Upper Adjara.

According to the 1728 "Tbilisi Vilayeti Big Defter", the territory of the vilayet was quite extensive and included almost the entire territory of present-day eastern Georgia, except Kakheti. The western parts of modern Azerbaijan and the northern parts of Armenia also entered the mentioned vilayet. This makes us think that the defter describes the whole Kartli at that time.

The issue about the name of the vilayet is also interesting. The Ottoman name "Gurjistan" meant the whole of Georgia, and that's what they called the territories they conquered as well.

Since by the 18th century there was already an administrative unit under the name of the province of Gurjistan, the newly joined territory (Kartli) could not be given the same name due to its large territorial coverage because it could not be merged with it. That's why the newly conquered territory (Kartli) was separated as an administrative unit, and its name comes from its important center (city) - Tbilisi.

From the administrative point of view, Tbilisi Vilayet was divided into 5 livas (Table 3). From here, only 2 nahiyas of Gori Liva came into Meskheta: Petre and Gujarati. A comparison with the 1595 "Gurjistan Vilayet defter" showed us that during the 16th-18th centuries, certain changes occurred in the administrative arrangement of the territory of Georgia conquered by the Ottomans, in particular, in the 16th century, the Borjomi Valley had a higher administrative status and was included in the Georgian Vilayet under the status of Peter's Liva. At the beginning of the 18th century, the Borjomi valley (already with the status of 2 nahiyas) was included in the Gori Liva of Tbilisi Vilayet, although the territory of the nahiyas did not change. Defter of Petre and Kashveti nahiyas of 1574 corresponds to Davtri Petre and Gujarat nahiyas of 1728.

It should also be noted that, according to the 1728 decree, the exact determination of the territory and intra-territorial division of the vilayet turned out to be quite difficult since there are many inaccuracies in it. A more detailed study of the issue is necessary.

Table 3. Administrative Unites of Tbilisi Vilayet, 1728

Livas	Nahiyas
Tbilisi	Tbilisi, Avlabri, Sabaratiano, Dmanisi, Baidar, Kaikuli
Gori	Satsitsiano, Mukhran, Saamilakhvro, Shavi Aragvi and Ksni Eristavi, Trialeti, Petre, Gomareti, Gujarati
Somkhiti	Armenia, Tashir, Fanbak
Akhcha kali	Akhcha kali
Kazaki	Anchi, Javad, Ahsabad, Terki

Today, it is very difficult to determine why the Borjomi valley was transferred from one province to another. This is a matter for the future, but some consideration can be given to moving it to a lower administrative status.

It is known from historiography that from the 16th century to the 18th century, Borjomi Valley was gradually almost completely deserted. Part of the population died in the fight against the invaders, and part of them moved to other parts of Georgia. Georgian material cultural monuments were significantly destroyed; the economy was disrupted. This is discussed in many scientific works (Abuladze, 1983; Berdzenishvili, 1985; Kudjadze, 1969; Makalatia, 1957). Therefore, the cancellation of Peter's Livy should have been a completely logical decision.

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Conclusion

As it is clear from the above-mentioned differences, the territorial similarities are not so small, but not many. Here it is important to find out which defters match each other—long or short notebooks. It is much more informative, matching according to extensive definitions, which gives us an opportunity to discuss several social-economical and onomastical features in a dynamic perspective. According to extensive data, we have territorial matching in the following geographical areas: Didi Artaan, Fanak, Petre, and Machakhli Livas. Because this coincidence includes different historical-geographical provinces (Artaani, Tori, Machakhela), it also gives us the possibility to find similarities and differences between these provinces. However, it is also clear that these provinces have different areas. The borders of big Artaani and Fanak are the largest areas (3432 km²), where according to the 1595 register, there are 200 villages and 86 villages. Petres Liva has a relatively small area (944 km²), where we see only 8 villages and 41 villages. The area of Machakhli Liva is much smaller, although according to the 1835 register, the number of villages is more here (21 villages).

Despite the small area of territorial coincidences, it provides a good opportunity to discuss the onomastic and social-economic situation from a dynamic perspective. If we compare the matching geographical area by the decades of 1574 and 1595, we will see an interesting picture. In 1574, there were 120 families in this area; between them, 114 were Christians and 6 were Muslims, and after 20 years, this picture changed significantly: the total number of families decreased to 36, and 34 of them were Christians and 2 were Muslims. What caused the population decline is difficult to say. However, the economic structure has not changed. The population had continued to grow agricultural crops (wheat, barley, millet, etc.) as before. Despite the decrease in population, it is strange that taxes have increased slightly. This side in 1574 used to pay 380 akhchas, but in 1595 it was increased to 500 akhchas. The reason for this could be inflation or increased taxes to accelerate the process of Islamization.

Because we do not have a territorial overlap according to the above-mentioned defters, and it is difficult to talk about the change of the demographical and economic picture, but the general trend

would be clear: it is an indicator of the irreversible process of the transition of the confessional issue from Christianity to Islam, which was also a factor in reducing the consciousness of ethnic belonging.

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Authors' contribution

D.S. and N. M. contributed to the design and implementation of the research, to the analysis of the results and to the writing of the manuscript. were involved in planning and supervised the work. A.A. and D. N. performed the analytic calculations. A.A. translated this paper from Georgian into English. D.N. took the lead in writing the manuscript. All authors provided critical feedback and helped shape the research, analysis, and manuscript.

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