



Occupied Territories of Sachkhere Municipality

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Abstract

The civil war of the 1990s, the weakness of coordination of the newly formed law enforcement agencies of the Republic of Georgia made it easier for the Russian Federation to achieve its aggressive anti-legal goals in two large historical regions of Georgia - the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia and the northern part of Shida Kartli (Tskhinvali, Java, Znauri, Kornisi). The Russian-backed separatist forces managed to escape from the control of official Tbilisi by forming their own illegal territorial associations. It is widely known that the activities of the separatist forces are much more active on the side of Shida Kartli than on the direction of Imereti, therefore, most of our citizens do not know that the so-called South Ossetia, the Russian Federation has occupied an important territory in the northeast of the Sachkhere municipality of Zemo-Imereti. Historically, as well as geographically, this area is practically not studied. Based on the current situation, it is practically impossible to study this territory directly in the field, but we tried to obtain several important information from local forced migrants (Vitaly Bakhturidze, Mevludi Kusiani). Which gives us a basis for important conclusions when summarized together with archival materials.

Keywords: History, Geography, Occupied, Cartography, Border

Introduction

While the historical and geographical research of occupied territories of Sachkhere Municipality special attention has been paid to historical toponymy (villages, old villages and microtoponymy), retrospective of orthographic and hydrographic naming. For this we studied old and new maps, where this territory is given, precision. Our attention was paid to the fact that toponyms of the municipality, especially orthographic units on maps and scientific literature is found with different names, also in Sachkhere section names of some mountains are not written at all, when all of them are equally important. First, we decided to solve this problem, learnt in detail and marked on the map historical and modern toponyms. For this we separated on the map village, old village, microtoponym, road, historic road, pass, churches, places of old churches, castles, hydrographic network and etc.

Based on all these it can be said that on our map there are given all the toponyms of research territory as well as historic and modern ones. It should be mentioned that in the process of research works of Vakhushiti Bagrationi were very helpful, also notices of Giuldenshtedti and Russian versions maps of XIX century. We used and compared to each other cartographic works of Alexandre and Ivane Javakhishvili.

In the process of research except historical –geographic parts, we presented issued of medical geography. which refers to the local balneological resort Lesevs, but there is almost no information about it in the literature that we have learnt. As an example of this it will be enough the ways of treatment of psoriasis by Lesevs mud and treating skin and gastrointestinal tract by local acid waters. Readers also will get information about the notices of local respondents, which refer to many important issues. Research will help the readers who are interested in local history and geography.

Methods and Materials

The Vakhushiti map is of greater importance for restoring the historical and geographical picture of the region, but it is very scarce and due to its scale, does not give a complete picture, nevertheless, its role as a source is immeasurably great. It was the map of Vakhushiti and his works that helped us to correctly read many toponyms on the map with Russian terminology and incorrect translation. It should be noted that the Russian map is immeasurably great in restoring the toponymy of the historical settlements of early Georgia in the 19th century ([Map of the Caucasus region XIX-XX, 1905](#)). The

materials found on the map of Russia were significantly supplemented and enriched with old historical names by the historical map of Ivane Javakhishvili ([Javakhishvili, 1923](#)), a map compiled in 1931-1932 ([Javakhishvili, 1932](#)), edited by Alexander Javakhishvili and others. Comparison of the materials shown on the mentioned maps helped us a lot in restoring a retrospective picture of the toponymy of the occupied territory of the Sachkhere municipality. Comparison of the materials given on the mentioned maps helped us a lot in restoring a retrospective picture of the toponymy of the occupied territory of the Sachkhere municipality. Based on the information received, we tried to create an approximate historical and geographical map of the country, which shows villages, microtoponyms, mountains, passes, rivers (with small streams), minerals, historical roads, balneological resorts, churches, parishes, etc. The article also talks about some issues of medical geography (treatment of psoriasis and various skin diseases with the mud of the Lesevi resort, etc.). Much attention is paid to historical demography (settlement and the number of Ossetian and Georgian surnames, the history of settlement). Particular attention is paid to the Ossetian and Georgian toponymy. The materials presented above are discussed in synthesis with historical events.

Results

The territory of the modern municipality of Sachkhere is geographically represented in a very diverse space, here you will find both complex terrain and mountainous areas, as well as floodplains and wide-open plains. The security of the municipality in the eastern and northern directions during the historical period was determined by the abundance of orographic objects located here. On the eastern side, the mountain system of the Likhsy ridge is isolated, which contributed to its relatively better protection. It is a historically known fact that the Likhi ridge was an obstacle to the advance of the enemy, who entered Eastern Georgia, into Western Georgia. The eastern line of the municipality is crossed by the following mountain system of complex geographical structure: Alkhashenda, Ribisi (modern Lebeuri), Biliurta (Obolis), Kardanakhumi, Rustavi, Shaharadeti, Lokhoni, Peranga, Mshvildauri (Shvildis), Dziri, Kortokhi, Edishvari and MtaVakisa. The mentioned mountains were an almost insurmountable barrier for the enemy advancing from east to west of Georgia. Strengthening the three passes located here, if necessary, was very convenient in terms of geographical location and a great advantage against the enemy encountered.

The same can be said about the northern part of the municipality, which is characterized by an even more complex geographical structure due to its mountainous terrain. Along the entire border line in the direction of Racha there are mountains: Veltkegi, Ketsebi, Didgora, Khikhamta, Sabvi, Phoni, Pepeleti (Sabugrao), Dagverila, Sirkhlabirti (Tsitelikle). In the specified geographical area there were six difficult passes, the protection of which, if properly fortified, created a very advantageous strategic advantage in the fight against the enemy. In written historical sources we find several important references to the occupied villages: Vakhushti Bagrationi, Johan Anton Kurt Guldenstedt ([Guldenstedt, 1962](#)) and Beri Egnatashvili. Vakhushti Bagration mentions the area above the village of Chali: "However, before Chalida there were no buildings; Garna was built first, where you can see churches and nadabars" ([Vakhushti Bagrationi, 1997](#)) As we see, Vakhushti describes exactly the territorial area that is the subject of our study.

The northeastern part of the Imereti-Kartli border, east of Mount Peranga, was historically part of the Kingdom of Kartli. Describing this area, Vakhushti Bagrationi notes that above the floodplain it is completely deserted, and there are only nosebleeds and swamps. This lack of population must have been the reason why Ossetians moved here in the 18th-19th centuries and created Ossetian villages, which subsequently became the basis for the administrative classification of this territory as the administrative district of South Ossetia, and not to the Sachkhere municipality, while the territory is geographically it is an integral part of Sachkhere. Moreover, in the 1922 project to create the South Ossetian Autonomous Region, Sachkhere was considered as the administrative center of the region instead of Tskhinvali, although this project was later rejected. The fluctuation of the mentioned administrative division was corrected during the restoration of independent Georgia in the 90s of the last century, and this territory was assigned to Sachkhere, although today it is an occupied territory ([Kekenadze & Katsitadze, 2014](#)).

Geographical boundary. The border of the Kartli kingdom often crossed the Likhi ridge here, and the geographical border was replaced by a political border. According to Vakhushti, the Kartli-Imereti border will pass above Lich - near Korbouli, along the Dzirula River, so that it will enter its borders from the left bank... ([Vakhushti Bagrationi, 1997](#)). Beri Egnatashvili speaks about this section of the

Kartli-Imereti border, who describes the situation of the 16th century, which some scientists consider to be a transfer of its modern borders into the past, but, in our opinion, it was this border that should have become the dividing line between Kartli-Imereti from the beginning of time, not the 18th century. According to Beri Egnatashvili, the Sachkhere section of the Kartli-Imereti border looks like this: „Tsedisi pass and Kudaro, and behind Mount Chali is Ertso, and behind Mshvildauri and Peranga are Goradziris-Akat, Lichi, Godora, Kefiskhevi and Chkheri Castle" ([Berdzenishvili, 1966](#)). As we saw above, the messages of Vakhushti and Beri coincide with each other. These two researchers are contemporaries of each other. According to Güldenstedt, the upper country, the upper region of Khvili, i.e. northeast from Sachkhere to the Likhsky ridge, looks like this: „this is a large part of the imperial slopes of the intersecting ridge, extending south from the Alps (Caucasus ridge). The east, i.e. the part located along Kartli and on the crest of the ridge, is called Saabashion" ([Life of Kartli, 1955](#)).

Historical roads passing through the occupied territories of Sachkhere were studied by N. Berdzenishvili. The roads were as follows: 1) Sachkhere-Chikha-Zana-Khvi-Tamarasheni-Tskhinvali; 2) Sachkhere – Chikha – Chala -Darka – MtaPeranga – Kornisi – Tsorbisi – Erkneti – Avnevi - Dvani-Breti; 3) Sachkhere – Chikha – Chala – Darka – MtaPeranga – Gomarta - Khtana – Ozhora – Tigva - Atotsi ([Berdzenishvili, 1966](#)).

When mapping the boundaries of the principalities, we encountered a slight misunderstanding: whether the territories of modern villages: Perevi, Jriya, Kardzmani, Tedeleti, Jalabeti, Khakhiet, Choisi should be included in the Saabashidze estate, whose possessions these territories are directly separated from. On the one hand, our assumption that this territory was part of the Principality of Saabashidze was supported by the general geographical confusion of Güldenstedt presented above. None of the mentioned villages appear on the map of VakhushtiBagration, which suggests that these villages did not exist then. The historical sources we have traced also do not tell us anything about the ownership of the territory. It is worth noting that we decided to include this territory in the Saabashidze estate due to the fact that these villages and territory are not part of the headquarters of ShidaKartli - Samachablo, which borders it in the east. Geographically, this territory belongs more to the Sachkhere municipality; they are sharply separated from the villages of the Yavan region by mountains: Sirkhlabirti, Alkhashenti, Ribisi, Biliurta, Kardanakhumi, Rustavi. These villages are geographically adjacent to the territory of the municipality of Sachkhere (formerly Saabashidze) ([Kekenadze, 2014](#)).

Due to the lack of old materials, the study of the historical demography of the occupied territories is possible only at the end of the 19th century. Since 1886, periodic demographic censuses began in the Russian Empire, and later in the 20th century in the USSR. Population censuses provide information about the number of residents of a particular village, ethnic and religious composition, etc. As we mentioned above, according to Vakhushti, in the 18th century the population no longer settled in this territory; we do not have any information that would confirm the presence of any settlement here before 1886, although in the 1886 census we already find one. The settlement is the village of Tedeleti, whose population is entirely Russian.

This part of Abashidze's Satavado especially suffered from Ossetian attacks, as local empirical information tells us, it was as a result of the Ossetian invasions that the previous settlements in this area, which Vakhushti calls Nadaburi and Nasoflari, were to be destroyed. The local population apparently took refuge in the nearby mountains, where villages appeared: Chitaeti (Chitadzes), Lomureti (Lomuridze), Davaeti (Davadzes) and others. The princes of this part of Saabashidze are called Abashidze Mtachale precisely because they did not live in Bari, in the valley of the Kvirili River. The generally accepted rule in this area was to transfer individual surnames to the name of the village, which suggests that the toponym Tedeleti recorded here may come from the Ossetian surname Tedelevi. There is also no empirical data about this toponym ([Kekenadze, 2017](#)).

According to the 1886 census, the village of Tedeleti is included in the Sachkhere district of Shorapni-Mazri. The composition of the population is as follows: total households - 28; people – 110; woman – 117; The total number is 227 people. The majority of the population are Ossetians, all Orthodox Christians. Neither the prince nor any of the clergy is registered in Tedeleti. There are 25 houses, 17 horses, 28 oxen and 28 carts.

In June-August 1918, an anti-government uprising broke out in the Sachkhere region, ethnic Bolshevik forces organized an armed uprising under the command of OsiKharebov and the Georgian Bagrat Khvedelidze ([Kekenadze, 2013](#)). The newly created independent Georgian government under the leadership of General Konstantin Ishkhneli was able to prevent the exit of the Ossetian and Georgian

Bolsheviks. The villages of the Tedeleti district are mentioned here, since, apparently, at that time the village of Tedeleti was presented as the administrative center of the region.

During the general census of 1926, the picture completely changed, the district is administratively no longer on the Sachkhere side (in 1886 it was part of the Sachkhere police district of Shoropni-Mazri), but as part of the newly created (1922). It is connected with the Kudaro and Kemultinsky districts of the South Ossetian Autonomous Region. In addition to the village of Tedeleti, the following villages are already appearing: Sinaguri, Khafalgom (Khampalgom), Khakhieti (Kakheti), Jalabeti (part of Kudaro), Tsoisi (Choisi, Noisi), (part of Kemulto). As we can see, the villages in this area have grown significantly over the past 30 years. Their numbers and ethnic composition are interesting: Tedeleti - only 460 inhabitants, 229 men, 231 women, of which 97.6% are Ossetians, 3.2% are Georgians. As we see, unlike 1886, the ethnic Georgian population is now settling in the village; Sinaguri - only 67 inhabitants, 36 men, 31 women, 80.6% Georgians, 19.4% Ossetians; Khafalgom - a total of 172 inhabitants, 84 men, 88 women, the population is entirely inhabited by ethnic Ossetians; Khakhieti - only 96 inhabitants, 56 men, 40 women, entirely populated by Ossetians; Jalabeti - only 165 inhabitants, 81 men, 84 women, all Ossetians; Choice - only 50 residents, 30 men, 20 women.

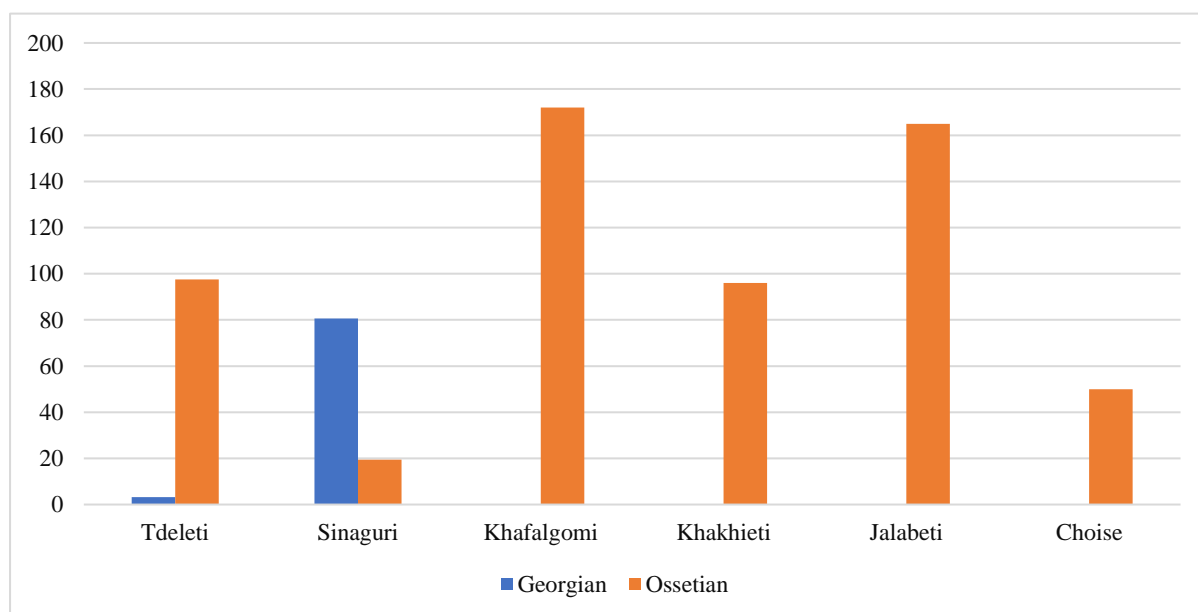


Figure 1. Ethnic groups in the villages of the study area based on 1926 census

In the 1939 census, the data from previous years was again changed: Hamfalgom - only 121 inhabitants, 58 men, 63 women (Zanian Village Council); Jalabeti - total 409 inhabitants, 235 men, 174 women; Zemo Kardzmani - total 345 inhabitants, 175 men, 170 women; Kvemo Kardzmani - total 107 inhabitants, 56 men, 51 women; Sinaguri - total 98 inhabitants, 51 men, 47 women; Tedeleti - total 527 inhabitants, 273 men, 254 women; Khakhieti - total 114 inhabitants, 57 men, 57 women (Tedeleti Village Council).

In the 1970 census, quite a lot of changes occur, completely new settlements appear: Tbeti, Perevi and Shua Kardzmani, of which Shua Kardzmani and Perev are completely populated by Ossetians and belong to the Dzhava district of the South Ossetian Autonomous Region. Sinaguri - a total of 164 inhabitants, 87 men, 77 women. Entirely populated by ethnic Ossetians; Tedeleti - a total of 316 inhabitants, 151 men, 165 women. Only the Ossetian population lives in the village; Jalabeti - only 139 inhabitants, 73 men, 66 women. The village is completely Ossetian; Khakhieti - only 108 inhabitants, 59 men, 49 women (Ossetian village); Perev - only 36 inhabitants, 15 men, 21 women (Ossetian village); Kvemo Kardzmani - only 140 inhabitants, 70 men, 70 women (the village is entirely represented by the Georgian population); Zemo Kardzmani - total 103 inhabitants, 45 men, 58 women (Ossetian village); Shua Kardzmani - only 71 residents, 33 men, 38 women (Ossetian village); Tbet - only 72 inhabitants, 31 men, 41 women. (the village is completely populated by Georgians), (Sinaguri village council); Hamfalgom - a total of 49 inhabitants, 19 men, 30 women (Ossetian village), (Tsoni village council).

According to the 1979 census, Shua Kardzmani disappears from rural settlements; we have no other significant changes. Sinaguri - total 204 inhabitants, 104 men, 100 women (Ossetians); Tedeleti - total

192 inhabitants, 102 men, 90 women (Ossetians); Jalabeti - total 114 inhabitants, 58 men, 56 women (Ossetians); Khakhieti - total 93 inhabitants, 51 men, 42 women (Ossetians); Perev - only 35 inhabitants, 20 men, 15 women (Ossetians); ZemoKardzmani - total 195 inhabitants, 104 men, 91 women (Ossetians); Kvemo Kardzmani - total 113 inhabitants, 63 men, 50 women (Georgians); Tbet - a total of 53 residents, 32 men, 23 women (Georgians) (Sinaguri village council); Hamfalgom - a total of 24 inhabitants, 10 men, 14 women (Ossetians) (Tsoni village council).

According to the 1989 census, significant changes took place in the ethnic composition, the Georgian population appeared in villages inhabited only by Ossetians. Sinaguri - total inhabitants 165, men 83, women 82. Georgians 53%, Ossetians 45%; Tedeleti - total inhabitants 146 people, 75 men, 71 women. Georgians 58%, Ossetians 41%; Jalabeti - only 53 inhabitants, 25 men, 28 women. The population is Ossetian; Khakhieti - only 61 inhabitants, 27 men, 34 women. Population - Ossetians; Perevi - only 27 inhabitants, 12 men, 15 women. Georgians 77%, Ossetians 21%; Kvemo Kardzmani - total of 148 inhabitants, 69 men, 79 women. Georgians 48%, Ossetians 51%; ZemoKartsman - total 157 inhabitants, 86 men, 71 women. Georgians 35%, Ossetians 51%; Tbet - a total of 58 residents, 26 men, 32 women. Georgians 74%, Ossetians 25% (Sinaguri village council); In Hamfalgom there are only 11 inhabitants, 6 men, 5 women. Ossuria (Zanian village council) (Geostat, 2024; Javakhishvili, 1923)

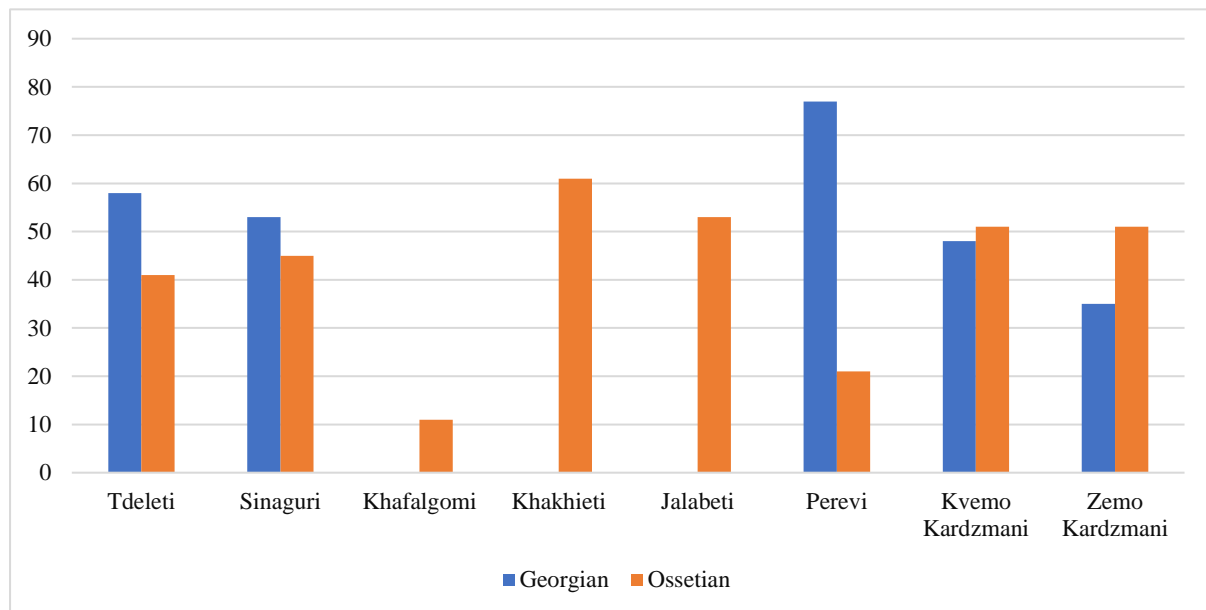


Figure 2. Ethnic groups in the villages of the study area based on 1989 census

In 1991, the Supreme Court of independent Georgia abolished the South Ossetian Autonomous Region, artificially created under the Soviet Union without any grounds, thereby restoring historical justice. Administratively, the villages confiscated in 1922 were returned to the Sachkhere district. Unfortunately, after the well-known events of the 90s, this territory was occupied by the Ossetian-Russian side. It should be noted that there was no armed confrontation between Georgians and Ossetians in the Sachkhere direction throughout the 90s. There was only one moment when the newly created Georgian Guard (the first Georgian Guard was created in Sachkhere under the command of Colonel Besiki Kutateladze) tried to take some action in the occupied territory of the Sachkhere region, which did not lead to any other clashes, except for minor incidents. A small incident was also related to a bunch of goods that were confiscated by the Ossetians and distributed to the Georgian population, but the local population, on their own initiative, took these goods back to the Ossetians. After the occupation of the 90s, only the village of Perevi remained under the jurisdiction of the Georgian side.

In the 2008 war, as well as during the events of the 90s, during the war, unlike Shida Kartli, there were no hostilities in the occupied territories of the Sachkhere municipality, although the Russian side occupied the village of Perevi, which was previously part of the South Ossetian autonomous region. According to the ceasefire agreement reached on August 12, 2008, the village of Perevi was to be handed over to the Russian army, but the Russian army still held this newly occupied territory along with the Akhagori region. On October 14, 2010, during the thirteenth round of Karasini-Abashidze negotiations in Geneva, Russian representative Karasin stated: "The Russian Federation has prepared and will soon withdraw the Russian border checkpoint from the settlement of Perev, which is located

on a geographically disputed territory.” Soon after the agreement, the village of Perevi was transferred to the jurisdiction of the Georgian side. It is in Perevo that a Russian checkpoint has now been established, through which communication with the occupied territories is carried out.

The fact that there was never an armed conflict between the local Ossetians and Georgians led to the peaceful coexistence of the Georgian population here in the Ossetian-occupied villages, but the Russian “peaceful” continent often blocked the road and did not allow the Georgian population to move freely. An example of the severity of the situation is the case of the family of Vitaly Bakhturidze, a resident of the village of Zemo Kartsman, whose two daughters were unable to cross the Russian checkpoint from the occupied territories due to the road being blocked. This is why they were unable to pass the national examinations and were forced to abandon higher education. There are quite a lot of similar cases among the local population, which leads to the fact that the Georgian population slowly leaves the occupied territories and moves to territories controlled by the Georgian side to live, although they still retain their property in the occupied territories.

Currently, the following villages operate in the occupied territories of the Sachkhere municipality: Sinaguri, Jalabeti, Tedeleti, Zemo Kartsmani, Kvemo Kartsmani, Tbeti. Villages that became rural: Fatkudzhina, Khafalgom, Dzirischala, Kheldakheuli, Sadarno, Choisi, Lohoisa, Gvizga, Gomarta. We tried to present the following local microtoponyms on the map: Fizarta, Mefi Stadsomi, Pantevi, Mokhveula, Dimitrias Namoslo, Pshanari, Magvlar, Skhliceri, Sachinos Aho, Sandro Aho, Dimnalia, Ukvakhe, Silion spring. Mountains: Peranga, Lokhon, Shaharadeti, Rustavi, Varkhnis, Kardanakhumi, Topara, Biliurta (Obolis), Ribis (Lebeuri), Dagverila, Sirkhlabirti (Red Rock). Passes through: Peranga, Rustavi, Ertso, Sirkhlabirti, Dagverila. Minerals: Coal, oil, gold. During the flood, gold-bearing rocks were carried out of the Kakarak gorge; back in Soviet times, it was planned to develop a gold deposit in this area, but due to developments this was no longer carried out.

The Russian map, published in 1906, also shows coal ores north of the village of Tedeleti and mentions oil-bearing rocks in several places. George Tsereteli, a nineteenth-century artist, as well as magazines and newspapers of the time provide us with information about the oil available here.

Churches/Parishioners. St. George Gomarti, St. George Fitsarmti, Vahanmti Church, Makvlis Church, Pshanari Church.

Rivers and gorges: Kvirila, Gvizga, Obolis water, Kartli gorge, Utsur gorge (Utsur waterfall is located here), Fizzarti gorge, Mariantuli gorge. All of these lakes contain large numbers of trout.

Ossetian toponyms: Darka (large village), Jria, Tedeleti, Sinaguri, Fatkudzhina.

Resort Lesev. In the occupied territory there is a balneological resort Lesev, famous for its healing mud and acidic waters. Since the second half of the 20th century, this place has already become widely known and a small boarding house was founded here. Lesevi mud was used to treat skin diseases; it was used to treat such serious diseases as psoriasis, lichen versicolor, etc. Currently, the sanatorium is not functioning, but residents of the neighboring village still transport this mud through various channels and use it for medicinal purposes. Displaced citizen Vitaly Bakhturidze recalls: “Viktor Bagaev had a boarding house in Les, where small wooden cottages were built for vacationers. Vacationers took both mud baths and were treated in local water baths, taking in acidic waters saturated with minerals. Here were the pastures and hayfields of the village of Kyrtsmeni. From Vitaly Bakhturidze we also recorded the legend about the toponym Heldakheuli: according to legend, Queen Tamar is buried in Heldakheuli. The fighters from Heldakheuli will take an oath of silence on Fitzarmt, and then kill each other so that no one knows about the location of Tamar's grave.

Conclusion

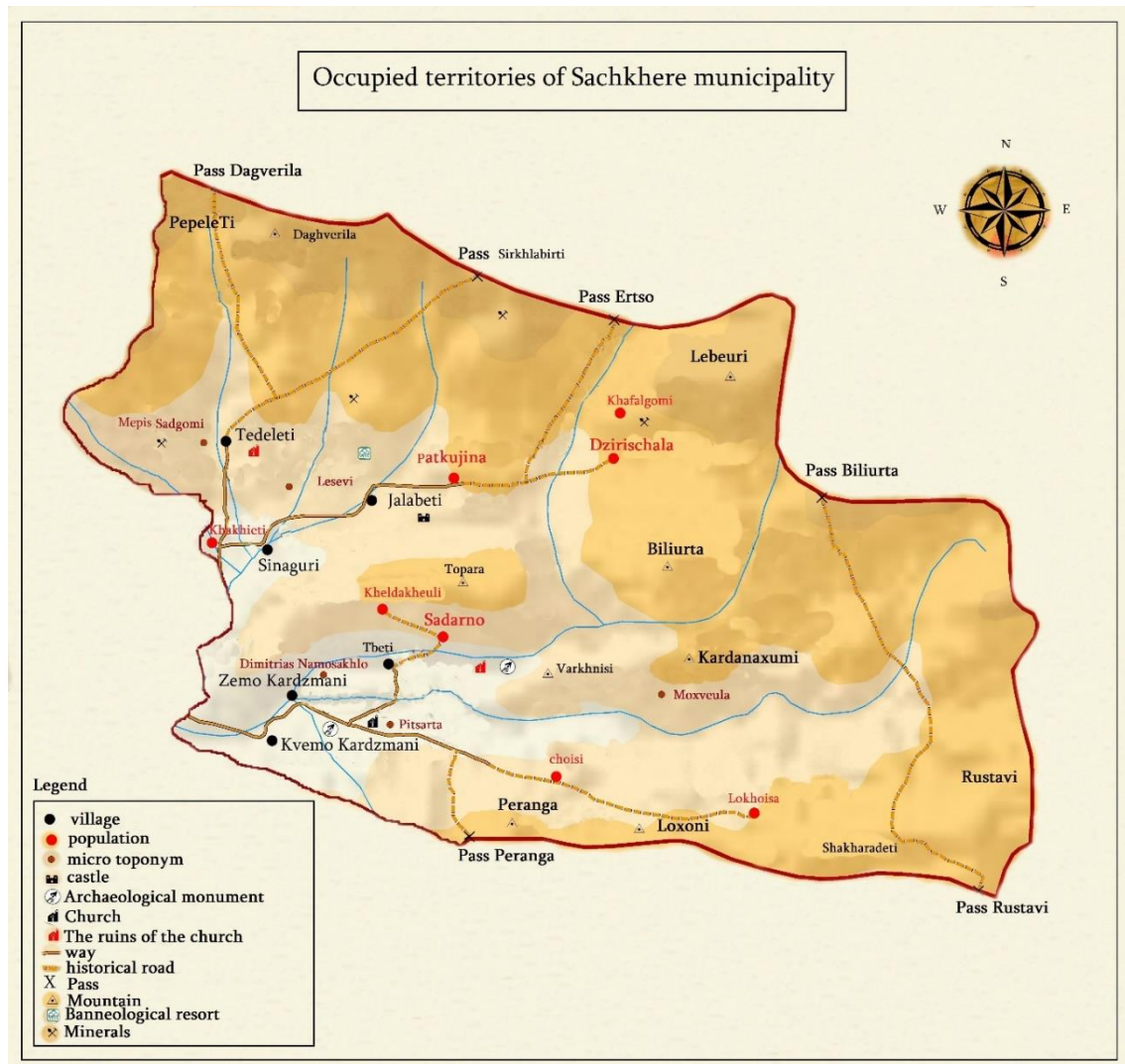
We tried to get information given in historical scientific literature and in cartographic works about occupied territories of Sachkhere Municipality. After proper analysis we used information found by us, that finally gave us an opportunity to make interesting conclusions.

In this research great emphasis is made on retrospective cartography of the side, it can be mentioned that the aim to represent historical and modern toponymy of the side was mostly done successfully. On the map it is separately represented historical toponyms (old villages, microtoponyms), modern toponymy, (villages, microtoponyms and hydrographical network), churches old places of churches, historical and modern roads, passes, castles, etc.

Except retrospective cartography, we aimed at publishing specific issues of historical geography of the side, in which works of Vakhushti Bagrationi, who had been on the territory of Sachkhere Municipality and describes modern or past historic conditions. Also, valuable facts were found is

specific historic sources and scientific literature. In this work much attention has been paid to the issues of historical demography. We showed the change of the local population from 1886 to 1989. After introducing our research to readers it will become clear the flexibility of inhabited places of the side at this period, also ethnic issues and specifics. Except wide demographic notice, readers will get information about administrative division, which village belongs to which region or a local community.


With historical notices given in the article we tried to show modern condition of the territory, for this reason respondents mentioned in the article helped us a lot, who left occupied territories without their own permission. Based on the information of this research we made historical –geographic map, that makes this work more conspicuous and visible.



Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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