



Political Geography of Sachkhere Municipality

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Georgian Geographical Journal, 2025, 5(3) 86-93

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DOI:

<https://journals.4science.ge/index.php/GGJ>

Citation: Kekenadze, V. Political Geography of Sachkhere Municipality. *Georgian Geographical Journal* 2025, 5(3), 86-93. <https://doi.org/10.52340/ggi.2025.05.03.10>

Abstract

Political geography, as a branch of historical geography, examines the political and geographical characteristics of a given territory through their integrated and holistic synthesis. It provides a clear representation of a country's administrative structure and the principal trends in its historical development, which have significantly influenced the political affiliation and spatial organisation of individual regions over time. The study of political geography also allows for the identification of long-term processes that shape territorial boundaries and governance systems. This article aims to present a comprehensive description of the political geography of the largest municipality in Upper Imereti—the Sachkhere region—from ancient times to the 19th century, highlighting key stages in its administrative evolution and territorial transformation within the broader historical and geographical context of the region.

Keywords: history, geography, politics, Argveti, nobility

Introduction

In developing this research topic, the aim was to examine the political geography of Sachkhere Municipality to the extent permitted by available documentary sources and scholarly literature. The chronological framework of the study primarily covers the period from the 5th to the 19th centuries. The article begins with an examination of the Argveti principality (სამთავრო, samtavro). This administrative unit occupied a strategically important geographical position, as it encompassed the Likhi Range, which divides eastern and western Georgia, as well as the historical passes that connected western Georgia with the eastern regions of the country. Based on an analysis of the available scholarly literature, an attempt is made to delineate the boundaries of the Argveti principality (სამთავრო, samtavro) and to clarify its territorial affiliation. The article also addresses the territorial scope and variability of historical geographical names, including Upper Imereti, as well as related macrotoponyms.

Following the definition of the boundaries and political affiliation of the Argveti principality (სამთავრო, samtavro), the study proceeds to examine the political geography of the Chihi principality (სამთავრო, samtavro), focusing on its territory and political affiliation.

In the 15th century, the unified Georgian Kingdom disintegrated. Whereas the earlier administrative system had been based on eristavis, this structure underwent a radical transformation. The eristavis were replaced by new, smaller political and administrative units known as principalities. Under this system, feudal families inherited their estates and enjoyed a higher degree of internal autonomy in governance than under the previous administrative arrangements.

After the collapse of the unified Georgian Kingdom, the territory of Sachkhere Municipality, together with the rest of Upper Imereti, became part of the Kingdom of Imereti. However, due to political circumstances and the region's geographical position, there were periods during which this territory was incorporated into the Kingdom of Kartli. Within the territory of the present-day Sachkhere Municipality, two principalities were formed: Satseretlo and Saabashidze.

For a certain period, the Palavandishvili family also held estates in the area; however, these lands were eventually confiscated by the two aforementioned noble families, leading to the expulsion of the Palavandishvilis from the municipality. Of the two dominant families, the Tseretelis were the most influential, owning approximately 80% of the municipal territory. Over time, the landholdings of the Abashidze family were significantly reduced by the Tseretelis, resulting in their territory being divided

into two non-contiguous parts. The Abashidzes who remained in Sachkhere retained control only over the villages of the present-day Chali community, including villages that are now occupied.

In addition to the noble families, the King of Imereti himself possessed estates within the territory of Sachkhere. These lands, known as royal domains, were administered by officials directly appointed by the king. Such estates included, for example, Khodabunebi (interpreted by Sulkhan-Saba Orbeliani as meaning "royal field") and Yaurebi. These domains were among the most fertile lands in the river valleys and were supplied with irrigation canals. The article also presents, as a separate issue, the territorial distribution of the historical region of Khefinihevi.

Methods and Materials

In conducting this research, ancient Georgian historical sources contained in *The Life of Kartli* were utilised, with particularly extensive material drawn from the works of Leonti Mroveli and Juansher. Significant contributions to the understanding of the topic were also provided by the scholarly works of Vakhushti Bagrationi, Koba Kharadze, Niko Berdzenishvili, Jurkha Nadiradze, Olga Soselia, and Valery Silogava.

In addition to the analysis of existing historical and scientific literature, all villages and settlements within Sachkhere Municipality were visited and documented during a scientific expedition carried out by the Institute of Geography of Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University in 2017. The present article is therefore based on a combination of primary historical sources, secondary scholarly literature, and original field research conducted by the authors.

Results

Argveti principality („სამთავრო“ - samtavro). Historically, the territory of Sachkhere Municipality was part of Zemo Mkhari or Upper Imereti, although this term has been used not since ancient times, but since the late feudal period. Before Zemo Mkhari, the territory of Sachkhere, like all of Eastern Imereti up to Persat-Rioni, was called Argveti, the same as Margveti, which represented a principality („სამთავრო“ - samtavro) or political-administrative division. Leonti Mroveli, the author of one of the chronicles of Kartli, defines the borders of the Argveti principality as follows: to the Likhi Range in the east, to the Rioni River in the west, to the Racha Mountains in the north (thus, Racha-Lechkhumi remained within its borders), and to the Persati Mountains in the south. According to the historian and geographer K. Kharadze, this region also included the Khanistskali River gorge and, possibly, the "land of Vani" of the Hellenistic period (Kharadze; 2003: 226). As we can see, the Argveti principality („სამთავრო“ - samtavro) previously included Okriba, but it later separated from Argveti and formed a separate geographic and political region (the geographic term Okriba was first mentioned in the 11th century), along with Zemo Khari, Vake, and Samokalako. According to historical tradition, in the 5th century, during the reign of Vakhtang Gorgasali, Racha-Lechkhumi (Takveri) was also part of Argveti, but later separated from Argveti and became an independent state. Racha was governed by its own eristavi, and he separated from Argveti. This development ultimately limited the borders of Argveti to only "Zemo Khari," that is, Upper Imereti (*Life of Kartli*. 1955: 24).

As we have already mentioned, Argveti extended to the eastern part of modern Imereti, including the territory of Sachkhere, while the term "Samokalako" has been used to designate the western part since at least the time of David the Builder. Let us cite a historical source: "Currently, Asisforni and Klarjeti are located within the sea pyramid of Ivanobis, Shavsheti, Adjara, Samtskhe, Kartli, Argveti, Samokalako, and Chkondidi are occupied by the Turks" (*Life of Kartli*. 1955: 319).

The 8th-century author Juansher proposes a completely different division of Western Georgia, while Leonti Mroveli lists the ethnographic regions of Western Georgia as Egrisi, Suaneti, Takueri, Argveti, and Guria (*Life of Kartli*. 1955: 241). As we can see, Imereti is also not mentioned here. Thus, new ethnographic terms emerged, while the upper region with Sachkhere remained part of Argveti. The term Imereti has been applied to Western Georgia only since the 11th century (the reign of David the Builder).

As already mentioned, the territory of Sachkhere Municipality has been administratively part of the Argveti principality („სამთავრო“ - samtavro) since the time of Parnavazi, a fact recognized by all scholars studying ancient Georgian history. Historical atlases indicate the municipality's modern territory as part of the Argveti principality („სამთავრო“ - samtavro). This is also confirmed by ancient Georgian authors such as Leonti Mroveli, Juansher, and Vakhushti Bagrationi.

In his historical collection, *The Life of Kartli*, Leonti Mroveli attributes the creation of the Argvetic chiefdom to King Parnavaz: "He sent one leader, Margvi, and gave him a small mountain, which is

Likhi, beyond the border (of Egris), above Rioni, and on this mountain Parnavaz built two fortresses, Shorapani and Dimna" (*Life of Kartli*. 1955:24).

Leonti Mroveli's historical conception partially echoes that of Juansher, who places this administrative unit in the same geographic region as Leonti Mroveli but, unlike him, presents it as a larger administrative district. According to Juansher, Bakuri, founded by Vakhtang Gorgasali as the principal of this region, simultaneously owned both Argveti and Takveri (*Life of Kartli*. 1955:185).

Vakhushti Bagrationi describes the borders of Argveti as follows: "And to the south of Racha, beyond the mountain, lies Argveti or Margveti, which was named for the fertility of the land and the roundness of the land for its labor—the roundness of the land. And the borders of Argveti are: to the east—the border of Kartli, the western side of Mount Likhi; to the south—Persati, Merme, Kharageuli, the Dzirula River; and to the east—the Kvirila River as far as Tskaltsiteli" (*Bagrationi*; 1997: 744).

After the death of Parnavazi, this territory became part of the Kingdom of Colkhi, which emerged in western Georgia. In the first half of the 2nd century, it again appeared as part of the Kingdom of Kartli.

Historical sources on the reign of King Parnavazi and Georgia at the time are extremely scarce. We are particularly concerned by the paucity of materials, especially regarding the locations of ancient cities, architectural monuments, and so on. Archaeology can greatly help us fill this historical gap. We will examine in detail the archaeological geography of Sachkhere and the significance of archaeology for history in the relevant chapter.

Archaeological discoveries in Upper Imereti confirm that by the mid-1st millennium CE, society of that period was at a fairly advanced level of development. This is evidenced by the late antique tombs of Modinakhe, Sairkhi, Itskisi, and Chikhi, which contain numerous brilliant examples of jewelry and weapons, clearly demonstrating the considerable economic resources of their owners.

The Early Middle Ages, the 5th and especially the 6th centuries, represent an eventful period in the history of both Kartli and Egrisi. This is the era of the outstanding kings Vakhtang Gorgasali, Gubaz I, and Gubaz II. The 6th century marks the abolition and restoration of statehood in Kartli, while in Egrisi, the "Great War" raged during the same period. Unfortunately, neither Georgian nor foreign sources provide any concrete information about Argveti during this period.

In the 650s, the Arabs invaded Georgia. The Samar, Jieti, and Itsksis burial grounds date back to the aforementioned events, and we have reason to believe that the community that created these monuments played an active role in the historical events of that period.

In the 780s, the Abkhazian eristavi Leon united all of western Georgia, naming it the Kingdom of Abkhazia, and Argveti also became part of this political entity.

Chikha Principality. In the late Middle Ages, Upper Imereti was indeed part of one of the important Georgian fiefdoms, the Argveti Principality, and the residence of Eristavi was also located there. The Chikha Principality is mentioned in the "Chronicle of Kartlis." In this historical source, the Argveti Principality of Leonti Mroveli and Juansheri is no longer mentioned, but rather "Chikhinsky Eristavi." Clearly, "Prince of Chikha" is undoubtedly a principality. The mention of this principality is associated with the Kartla of the Abkhazian kings: "At that time, George, king of the Abkhazians, brother of Theodosius and Demetrius, son of Leonidas, set out. He conquered Kartla and left the principality to Demetrius, son of Chikha. When George, the king of the Abkhazians, died, he left a son, Dmitry the Younger, whose name was Bagrat, and who was known to his acquaintances. The wife of King George killed her son Dmitry, the principality of Chikhi" (*Life of Kartli*. 1955: 258). As can be seen from the above quote, the "principality of Chikhi" is mentioned only twice in Georgian historiography. N. Berdzenishvili doubted that in this case the "Chikhinsky Eristavi" meant the Eristavi of Kartli (Berdzenishvili; 1975: 354). If Chikha was the eristavi of Kartli, then it is clear that Upper Imereti of this period was also included within the borders of Kartli.

From an archaeological point of view, the village of Chikha remains virtually unexplored, and it was only in the 1970s that J. Nadiradze conducted some exploratory work here. To the south of the village church, at the Gobinari settlement, extremely scant remains of layers containing material culture from the early antique and Hellenistic periods were confirmed. Small fragments of red-painted and red-toned ceramics were discovered (*Nadiradze*; 1990: 135-136). N. Berdzenishvili believed that Chikha was the successor of Sachkhere in a later period (*Berdzenishvili*; 1966: 31). According to this opinion, Chikha and Sachkhere could have been one and the same geographical location. This assumption should be supported by the data from the Modinakhe burial ground, since this is the only archaeological monument from the medieval period discovered in the area of Sachkhere and Chikha to date.

J. Nadiradze pointed to the Modinakhe necropolis and noted that, from the beginning of the late antique period, the center of Argveti principality („სამთავრო“ - samtavro) was supposed to be located on the right bank of the Kvirili River, while the residence of the rulers of this country, as well as the necropolis, were supposed to be located on the territory of Sachkhere. Based on the norms of the Old Georgian language, the researcher did not rule out the possibility of a connection between the comparatively late toponym Sachkhere and Chikha (Nadiradze; 1975: 76). If this opinion is correct, then it becomes clear that the Modinakhe necropolis laid the foundations of the medieval Chikha (Sachkhere) principality („სამთავრო“ - samtavro). Sachkhere has a much more favorable strategic location than Chikha. Vital roads converged near Sachkhere, which always carried heavy traffic and played an important role in the political and economic life of the country.

As J. Nadiradze's archaeological research has shown, the 6th–7th centuries represented the settlement's heyday. Almost the entire hill was inhabited, and the cultural layers reach a thickness of 2 meters. Based on this fact, archaeological literature suggests that the Itskhisi Fortress of this era may have been the main fortification in the upper reaches of the Kvirili River, controlling the roads leading to the mountains and plains of Shida Kartli (Makharadze; 2005: 40).

In studying the ancient history of Sachkhere, along with Modinakh and Chikha, the Itskhisi Fortress of this period is of great importance. The architectural monuments surrounding the Itskhisi Fortress demonstrate the particular significance of the area, among which the Church of St. George in Savani stands out for its historical significance. The church's façades are richly decorated and represent an interesting example of 11th-century architecture. Several historical inscriptions have been preserved on the walls of the church, among which the inscription on the tympanum of the southern gate is particularly significant, revealing that the church was built by George Eristavteristavi in 1046, during the reign of King Bagrat IV. The names of Eristavteristavi's deceased parents, Gulzviad and Mariam, and Goliath's brother and son, are also inscribed here (Silogava; 1980: 59). Queen Mariam and her children, Giorgi and Khursi, are also mentioned in a 1,000-year-old inscription of the Koret Church's Divine Liturgy, studied and published by G. Gaprindashvili (Gaprindashvili; 1970: 54-61). He also correctly linked the founders of the Savani and Koret churches and believed that the name of Giorgi Eristavi's brother, the Eristavi from the Savani Church inscription, was Khursi.

Thus, the builder of the church in Savani was Giorgi Eristavteristavi. He was a member of a powerful feudal house, and there is no doubt that this family, in addition to large estates, owned roads leading to Kartli and was engaged in extensive construction activities. The existence of the Itskhisi Fortress and the Church of St. George in Savani is consistent, and it is possible that the Itskhisi Fortress was the residence of this powerful feudal house.

In the 10th century, the unified Georgian Kingdom was established, and Argveti, of course, was politically part of it.

In 1329, King George the Magnificent united the country devastated by the Mongols and reclaimed Western Georgia, including the Argveti principality („სამთავრო“ - samtavro).

In the 15th century, a unified Georgia finally disintegrated, and Georgian kingdoms and principalities arose on its ruins (Kharadze; 2005: 227). Part of Sachkhere's territory at this time remained part of Kartli, while the rest became part of the Kingdom of Imereti. Two noble estates, Satseretlo and Saabashidze, were established on the territory of today's Sachkhere Municipality. Both royal and princely estates, as well as church villages, were located here. We will discuss this in more detail below, when discussing the nobility and the royal estate.

Nobility. The Imereti principality („სამთავრო“ - samtavro). system began to take shape during the reign of Parnavazi (Argveti principality). After the collapse of unity, the territory was largely divided into separate noble houses. The system underwent significant changes until its end (the second half of the 19th century). The Imereti nobility was almost completely formed in the 15th century; at this time, the unified Georgia collapsed, and the country was divided into several kingdoms and principalities. It was from this time that the nobility in Imereti began to grow significantly.

From the 15th to the 19th centuries, a feudal noble system existed within the territory of the municipality within the Kingdom of Imereti. Two noble houses, Satseretlo and Saabashidze, were present within the boundaries of the modern municipality; their approximate locations are also shown on the map. A significant change to these borders occurred only in the first half of the 18th century, when the growing Tsereteli family seized the villages of Lichi, Makhatauri, Savane, Koreti, and Godora from the feudal house of Saabashidze. The border line is shown on the accompanying map as it existed in the 18th and 19th centuries.

While mapping the principalities' borders, we encountered a minor confusion: should the territories of the modern villages of Perevi, Jria, Kardzmani, Tedeleti, Jalabeti, Khakheti, and Choisi be included in the Saabashidze estate, whose estates these territories directly adjoin? None of these villages are indicated on Vakhushti Bagrationi's map, suggesting that they did not exist at the time. The historical sources we found also provide no clue as to the ownership of this territory. It's noteworthy that we decided to include this territory in the Saabashidze estate because these villages and territories are not mentioned as part of the Shida Kartli-Samachablo principality, which borders it to the east. Geographically, this area belongs more to the Sachkhere Municipality and is sharply separated by mountains from the villages of the Java region: Sirkhlabirti, Alkhashenti, Ribisi, Biliurta, Kardanakhumi, and Rustavi. These villages are geographically directly adjacent to the territory of the Sachkhere Municipality (formerly Saabashidzeo).

Based on the above sources and personal observations, we have compiled a retrospective cartography of the nobles who lived in the territory of today's Sachkhere Municipality in the 15th–19th centuries.

In 1810, the Russian Empire conquered and abolished the Kingdom of Imereti, and the old form of noble rule ceased to exist along with the kingdom ([Soseliya; vol. II, 1981: 203](#)).

Satseretlo. One of the largest and most powerful nobles was Satseretlo, which was formed around the 16th century. The Tsereteli nobles lived in Upper Imereti. This included primarily the territories of today's Sachkhere and Chiatura municipalities, as well as small parts of the Terjola (Dzevri), Oni, Ambrolauri, Kareli, and Khashuri municipalities. The borders and the area of settlement of the nobles in Sachkhere are shown on the map.

The Tseretelis also owned serf estates: Chikha, Didtsipela, Opcha, Darkveti, Sakurze, Katskhi, Tsinsopeli, and others. The Tseretelis owned Mount Khikhata, "Hunter's Mountain," and part of the village of Rokiti.

Satseretlo's borders were: the Racha Principality to the north, the Dzirula River to the south, the Likhi Range to the east, and the Chiatura Waters to the west.

Among the Georgian nobility of the 15th–19th centuries, nothing has been studied as thoroughly as the history of the feudal house of Tsereteli. The historian Olga Soselia made the first contribution to this.

The Tseretelis were not native to Imereti; this opinion is unanimous among scholars studying the history of the nobility. Etymologically, there are numerous place names in Saingilo and Kartli containing the surname Tsereteli, allowing researchers to conclude that the Tseretelis migrated from Saingilo to Kartli, and from there to Imereti. The Tseretelis likely migrated from Kartli to Imereti after the invasions of Temur-Leng.

"Satseretelo" as a designation for an estate belonging to the Tsereteli family has been found in the territory of modern-day Sachkhere since the 16th century.

The Tseretelis were a border noble family of the Kingdom of Kartli. In the late 16th century, during the campaign of King Simon of Kartli into Imereti, they fought on his side. During the reign of Vakhtang V Shahnavazi (1658–1675), Satseretelo was apparently a vassal of the king of Kartli, not Imereti.

The Tseretelis were hostile to Giorgi Saakadze during his vassal rule. Vakhushti Bagrationi writes: "The Mouravis threatened the Tseretelis of Kveli. The Mouravis were forced to burn his estate; the Tseretelis of Kveli attacked the Mouravis, and they fought each other. But Mouravi shot three arrows into his chest, and "Kveli and Mouravi were victorious" ([Bagrationi; 1913: 67](#)).

The Tseretelis became especially powerful in the second half of the 18th century and became the most powerful noble family in Imereti ([Soseliya; 1947: 252–254](#)).

Saabashidzeo. Saabashidzeo was formed in the 15th century and primarily included villages in the modern-day Zestafoni, Kharagauli, Tskaltubo, Terjola, and Chiatura municipalities. Geographically, Saabashidzeo was divided into two parts, the second part being located in Sachkhere, the borders of which are clearly marked on the map. Saabashidzeo's borders are: Racha principality („სამთავრო“ - samtavro) to the north, the Dzirula River to the south, the Likhi Range to the east, and the Argveta-Chkhara to the west. The Abashidzes owned the fortresses of Shorapani, Shroshi, Chalatki, and Tsutskhvati.

Beginning in the 15th century, the Abashidze-Saabashidzeo feudal clan, with its center in the village of Chala, emerged on the territory of today's Sachkhere municipality. The Abashidzes owned a palace, a fortress, a court church, and a crypt in Chalashiya.

Until the 18th century, the Abashidzes owned extensive estates in Sachkhere, controlling almost 60% of the territory. Beginning in the 16th century, after the Tsereteli family settled nearby, they gradually lost their holdings and became relatively weak.

Since the 18th century, the Abashidzes have controlled only the northeastern territory of Sachkhere. Their fiefdom was bordered to the north by the Racha Range and the following mountains: Sabvi, Phoni, Pepeleti, Dagverila, Sirkhlabirti, Ribisi, and Alkhashenda; to the east by Obolisi, Kardanakhumi, and Rustavi; to the south by Mount Peranga, Lkhoni, and Shakharadeti; and to the west by Didgora, Didi Tskhepari, Patara Tskhepari, and Tsiplari. Between these orthographic divisions lay the Sachkhere section of the Saabashidzeo patrimony, centered in the village of Chala. It included the following villages: Drbo, Gona, Orguli, Tkemalauri, Batskiuri, Panisuri, Khlebi, Perevi, Zaskhleti, Tskheprisdziri, Davaeti, Khakhieti, Tedeleti, Sinaguri, Jalabeti, Patkudjina, Khafalgomi, Dzirischala, Kheldakheuli, Sadarno, Tbeti, Kartsmani, Tsoysi, Lokoysa, Sarbeti, Darka, Sakohia, D. Itsikisi, Velebi, Churnali, Jriya, Chabukmta.

There are several versions of the Abashidze family's origins. According to one, they hail from the village of Chala in the Sachkhere municipality, where their surname originates. Another says they hail from the village of Sargveshita in the Kharagauli municipality.

In ancient times, the Abashidze's origins in Chala were apparently considered more credible. This is supported by a legend about the Abaiidze clan, which tells of the migration of Murvan the Deaf to Abkhazia and his battle with King Archil. It mentions Abash in Murvan the Deaf's army: "Among these people, a boy was born from the lineage of a certain bek, whom King Archil honored and raised alongside himself. Later, during a hunt, a wolf attacked King Archil's son, John, to warn him, and then Abash drew his sword and killed the wolf." Ganarina became the king's son, and as a reward, the king ennobled Archil, gave him the surname Abashi, and granted him estates in Chala and Zosiat-Khevi. He also accepted the other Abashids who were with him as nobles and settled them in Chala, who are called "Chalel Abashidze" (Akhuashvili; 2010: 128). The information provided contains numerous anachronisms and inconsistencies, but we consider this source pure legend and will focus solely on the fact that the village of Chala is listed as the Abashidzes' original residence, which is certainly no coincidence and must stem from historical information that the Abashidzes originated from Chala. It is also worth noting the second toponym mentioned here—Zosiat Khevi—a similar name is found north of Chala. The similarity with the ridge near Lake Ertso-Zostsveri is obvious. In our opinion, Abashidze's place of origin should be Chala. This is also supported by ancient sources mentioned in epigraphic materials in the Sachkhere municipality.

Vakhushti Bagrationi, in his "Tavarta Guartatvi," writes about Imereti: "The Abashidzes, Palavandishvili, and Amirejibi, in this union, owned estates in Imereti and Kartli, and after the division of the kingdom, one brother was placed there and the other here, as their estates and deeds show" (Life of Kartli. vol. IV, 1973: 35). Vakhushti's quote echoes the ancient historical reality, when the eastern part of Imereti was under the rule of Palavandishvili and Abashidze, and the Amirejibi bordered them on the Kartli side.

The Estates of the Kings of Imereti. In the 15th century, Georgia was divided into kingdoms and principalities. Within the Kingdom of Imereti, a new feudal property system—the nobility—emerged in place of the old principalities. The nobles had various hereditary families, and some nobles were granted complete independence from the king in internal affairs, which generally meant complete exemption from taxes. For example, the Satseretlo estate in Zemo Mkhare was precisely such a noble estate. Although noble estates often encompassed a single geographic area, the kings of Imereti had their own estates within these noble estates. Ownership of these estates often extended to an entire village, or a specific part of the village belonged directly to the king. In these scattered villages, the king had his own nobles, or simply the king's peasants, who paid various taxes to the king. It should also be noted that often in Imereti the same village simultaneously included: royal, princely, noble and monastic lands.

In the Sachkhere domains (Satseretlo, Saabashidzeo), the royal holdings were very small; the king owned only a few villages and estates. The king often donated his estates to nobles, churches, and monasteries. The king often returned the donated estates for various reasons.

During the reign of Solomon I, the royal holdings consisted entirely of the villages of Shalaouri, Lichi, and Godora, which belonged to nobles living in Sachkhere. Ownership of the aforementioned villages later frequently passed from the king to nobles.

As mentioned above, the king owned estates located in various villages. On the territory of Sachkhere, the king had estates in the village of Koreti and the city of Sachkhere itself, where the king owned a large part of Khodabune (the lord's field) (Abesadze; 1973: 11, 12, 36).

As is evident from historical documents of the Imeretian Kingdom published by Sh. Burjanadze, Lichi and Godora (historical Khepinishkevi) were royal possessions until the second half of the 17th century, after which the king granted these villages to the Abashidze family, within whose borders they were located (Burdzhanadze; 1958: 14, 32). As is evident from documents cited in acts published by the Caucasian Archaeological Commission, the king again took the villages from the Abashidzes, as established by the tskhro given in the book of tribute granted by Solomon II to Zurab and Papuna Tsereteli in 1805 (Acts, vol. VI: 825).

As we see, in the 19th century, the Tseretelis occupied most of the royal holdings in Sachkhere.

Khepinikhevi. Khepinikhevi, as we already mentioned, united the villages of the upper Dziruli Gorge valley in the Sachkhere region; its location is marked on the map we plotted during fieldwork. In the "Collection of Georgian Historical Documents of the 9th-13th Centuries" (1984), we discovered a charter issued by King David Narin in 1266. The king exempted Khepinikhevi and Tsakveli from all taxes and granted them immunity: "...We made them inviolable and removed them from all interference: from the state, the principality („სამთავრო“ - samtavro), and the memisupaloi" (p. 167).

After the 13th century, Khepinikhevi is mentioned in the 18th century as a royal possession of King Erekle II, which he gave to Abashidze, thus incorporating Khepinikhevi into the Kingdom of Imereti.

Conclusion

In exploring the topic of this study, we attempted to conduct a systematic study of the political geography of Sachkhere Municipality. By reviewing relevant literature, historical sources, and archival materials, we introduced a number of innovations to the region's political geography through on-site fieldwork. Using historical documents, this article examines the formation of the first historical province located here—the Argveti Principality—and the changes in its geographic boundaries over time. Following the political geography of the Argveti Principality, the article examines the nature of the Chikhi Principality, its formation, and its geographic location. This topic is directly linked to the historical processes that have occurred since the disappearance of the Argveti Principality.

In the 15th century, the unified Georgia disintegrated, which had a significant impact on administrative matters. The old traditional territorial division was completely overturned and replaced by separate noble classes. Two noble classes emerged in Sachkhere – Tseretelibi and Abashidze. This work examines in detail the formation of both classes, the changing borders, and the ownership of individual territories.

Along with the Tseretelibi and Abashidze classes, Sachkhere Municipality also included estates directly owned by the king. Revenues from these estates were channeled directly to the king, rather than following the traditional "peasant-chieftain-king" chain. The work also provides the territorial boundaries of one of Georgia's largest gorges, Khefinihevi, and its location within Sachkhere Municipality. This work will be useful to researchers interested in the historical geography of Imereti.

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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