

HISTORY - ИСТОРИЯ**BEZHAN KHORAVA****Doctor of History, Professor University of Georgia (Georgia)****ABKHAZIA****THE BRIEF HISTORICAL-GEOGRAPHICAL REVIEW****DOI: 10.52340/ISJ.2022.25.11**

Abkhazia (Aphazeti in Georgian, Apsny in Abkhazian), the historical and geographical province of Georgia, is situated in the North-Western part of the country on the Black Sea coast, between the rivers Enguri and Psou. The River Psou and the Greater Caucasus separate the autonomous republic from Russian Federation while the Kodori and Abkhazian-Svanetian mountain ranges of the Greater Caucasus and the River Enguri – from the neighbouring Georgian regions of Svaneti and Samegrelo. The area of Abkhazia is 8700 square kilometres, which comprises 12.3% of the territory of Georgia [1].

The Greater Caucasus spreads from the North-West to the South-East of Abkhazia. The following peaks of the Greater Caucasus are located within Abkhazian: Dombay-Ulgen, Gvandra, Ertsakhu, Pshish, Aghepsta. There are several pathways across the Sancharo, Adzapsha, Alashtrakhu, Ptishi, Nahari, and Magana passes of the Greater Caucasus. There is a pathway to Svaneti through Khida pass. In the past centuries the Marukha, and Klukhori passes were used for trading and communication with the North Caucasus [2]. The Greater Caucasus steeply descends to the canyons of the rivers Bzipi, Chkhalta, and Sakeni. The mountainous part of Abkhazia is occupied by the spurs of the Greater Caucasus. The Gagra range is the most Western of them. Then is the Bzipi range, which is linked with the Chkhalta (Abkhazian) range. To the East the Kodori range divides the Kodori basin from the basins of rivers Mokvi, Ghalidzga, and Enguri. Its part to the Khojali Mountain is called the Abkhazeti-Svaneti range, while the part west from the Khojali Mountain is called Panavi range [3].

Abkhazia is a mountainous country. 75% of its territory is occupied by the mountains and foothills, while the rest is covered by the valleys and lowlands. In some places the mountains are situated directly at the seashore, in other places there is a gap between them. In the North-West, on the left bank of the River Psou, the valley continues for 10-15 kilometres between the sea and the Caucasus. Then the Gagra range comes directly to the sea. To the South-east

from Gagra the mountains gradually recede and the narrow seaside valley zone transforms into Bichvinta (Pitsunda) lowlands. To the South-East from Bichvinta (Pitsunda) the mountains again approach the Black Sea and nearby Akhali Atoni leans against it. To the South-East from Sokhumi the seaside zone gradually widens and beginning from the left bank of the River Kodori, passes into the Colchic lowlands. The seaside zone is usually straight but the Gagra, Bichvinta (Pitsunda), Bombora, Sokhumi, and Skurcha bays [4].

In the middle flow of the River Kodori, to the North from the Kodori range, the highland region of Tsebeli is situated. In the upper reaches of the River Kodori another

highland region Dali can be found. In the upper flow of the River Bzipi, between the Greater Caucasus and Bzipi ranges the mountainous region of Psokhu is located. The mountainous side of Aibga is situated in the source of the Psou river. The River Psou divides it into two parts. Most of Aibga is in the territory of the Russian Federation, while a small part (160 km²) is in the territory of Georgia. The name Aibga means “evil ridge” in Adyghe language. According to the dominant point of view, Psokhu is a composite name consisting of the Circassian suffix - ps (water) and the Abkhazian suffix -khu/-akhu (mountain, hill). The name Tsebeli is derived from the name of the early medieval castle Tsi-bili/Tsibilium, which is mentioned in Byzantine sources. The name of the fortress is connected with Tsipeli (Megr.-Svan – Tsipuri, Tsipra, Tsipelita), the Georgian name of the beech [5]. An interesting opinion has been expressed lately, that the name Tsibili (of the Greek sources) derives from the Megrelian word “chibili” (“firmly built”). According to popular belief, the name Dali is derived from the name of the Svan hunting deity and means “Dali Kingdom” [6].

Abkhazia is covered with the dense net of the rivers, which belong to the Black Sea basin: The Psou, the Bzipi, the Kodori, the Gumista, the Kelasuri, the Ghalidzga, the Mokvi, and the Enguri. The River Psou (length 53 km, basin size 421 km²)

is the border river of Georgia and Russia. It flows from the mountain range of Aibga and falls into the Black Sea near the village Leselidze. According to the established viewpoint, its name derives from the Adyghe language and means “quick, swift river.” To the South-East from the Psou the River Mekhadir (length 15 km, basin size 23 km²) flows. Its source is located on the South-West slopes of the Gagra range. The Mekhadir falls into the Black Sea near the village Gantiadi. The longest river of Abkhazia is the Bzipi (length 115 km, basin size 1510 km²). It begins from the Adange pass on the Southern slopes of the Greater Caucasus, at the height of 2640 metres above sea level. It falls into the Black Sea near Bichvinta (Pitsunda) cape. Bzipi is a modern name of the river. It was called “Kapoetis Tskali” (the River Kapoeti) till 1820s. This is a Georgian name and derives from the name of the fish “Kapoeti,” which belongs to the family Salmonidae. “Kapoeti” is a large variety of trout which dwells in this river [7]. The hydronime “Bzipi” supposedly is also of Georgian origin as it is associated with the name of the plant “Bza” (Buxus). The main river of Abkhazia flows along the valley where boxwood is the dominant tree [8].

To the South-East of the Bzipi flows the Mtchishta or Shavtskala (Black River), the karst river with its source at the South slopes of the Bzip range and falls into the Black Sea to the West of Gudauta. In the Medieval times it was called “Mitsis Tskali”, i.e. “Earth River” (Underground River) as its great part flows under the earth. Its Abkhazian (The Mtchishta) and Russian (The Black River) names represent the translation of the original Georgian name “Shavtskala” (“black water”). To the South-East from the Mtchishta the

River Khipsta (length 33 km) flows from the Southern slope of the Bzipi range. It falls into the Black Sea near Gudauta. Its Abkhazian and Russian names (The White River) are also the translation of the Georgian name Tetrtskala. In the Middle Ages this river was called the Zupu. The name of the political centre of the Abkhazian Principedom in the 17th-19th centuries – Zupu (present-day Likhni) – has derived from this river, because it was located on its banks [9].

A small river, the Psirtska, flows into the Black Sea northwest of Akhali Atoni (New Athos). In the Middle Ages it was called the Anakopia River after the old fortress-town, Anakopia (present-day Akhali Atoni). To the South-East of the Psirtska the River Gumista flows and joins the Black Sea west of Sokhumi. The River Besleti flows into the Black Sea within the boundaries of the present-day Sokhumi. In the Middle Ages it was called the River Tskhomi after the city of Tskhomi (now Sokhumi). To the

East of Sokhumi (near the village of Kelasuri) the Kelasuri River joins the Black Sea. The largest river (in Abkhazia) to the southeast of Kelasuri is the River Kodori. It flows in the Dali Valley and joins the Black Sea South of the village Adzubzha (Historical name Shkatskari /“The Middle River” in Megrelian/, the same as Shuatskali /in Georgian/, which was directly translated into Abkhazian as Adzubzha). The name “Kodori” has Georgian etymology and has derived from the word “Kad” (common-Georgian for water).

The significant river is the Mokvi. It starts from the Southern slopes of the Kodori range and joins the Black Sea near Ochamchire. To the east of Ochamchire the River Ghalidzga flows into the Black Sea. In the Middle Ages it was called Egristskali (“The Megrelian River”). The name Ghalidzga is of the Megrelian origin and means “the bank of the river.” Initially it was the name of the riverside village. On the South slope of the Kodori range starts the River Okumi and falls into the Black Sea near the village Gudava. The name Okumi is of Georgian origin (it has derived from Megrelian “Kumu”) and means “the place where flax is cultivated.” At first it was the name of the village and then it became the name of the river. The right tributaries of the Okumi are the rivers Tsarche (The Dadistskali of the Medieval Georgian sources) and Okhodje. The left tributary of the River Okumi is called the Didi Eristkali (Ertistskali of the historical sources). To the East from Okumi flows the fast and deep River Enguri. It takes its source in Svaneti from the glacier Enguri and joins the Black Sea near the village of Anaklia [10]. The old name of the river is the Eguri and has derived from Egri, the tribe which lived mainly in the lower reaches of the river [11].

There are many lakes in Abkhazia. The following should be singled out: Ritsa, Small Ritsa, Blue Lake, Mzi in the Bzipi basin; Amtkel, Kvarash, Adueda Adzij, Derikvara Adzish in the Kodori basin; Inkiti, Great Bebesiri, Bebesiri, Papantskvili in the coastal area [12]. Lake Ritsa is located at the height of 884 metres above sea level in the Iupshara (the right tributary of the Bzipi) Gorge. Ritsa is the deepest lake in Georgia (101 meters). The banks of Lake Ritsa are surrounded with the mountain slopes which are covered with the conifers and mixed forests. Because of this, Ritsa is considered to be one of the most picturesque lakes of the Caucasus. The small but very beautiful Blue Lake is located on the right bank of the River Bzipi, close to the Black Sea. Lake Inkiti is situated in the Bichvinta (Pitsunda) valley nearby the mouth of the River Bzipi [13].

The geographic location determines Abkhazia’s climate. The Greater Caucasus protects it from the

cold Northern winds. Warm, never freezing sea and rapid mountain rivers create a humid subtropical climate. The atmospheric precipitation ranges from 1300-1500 to 2200 millimetres throughout the year [14]. Approximately 55% of Abkhazia's territory is covered with forests. There are over 2000 varieties of the plants in Abkhazia. The main varieties of the trees growing in Abkhazia are: Oaks, hornbeams, maples, linden, beeches, chestnuts, walnut trees, firs, pines, boxwood, etc. There is the pine relict grove on Bichvinta Cape, where the State Reserve was established in 1926. There are also the alder forests in the South-East Abkhazia, where the swamps are still preserved. The unique example of Abkhazian flora is boxwood with the (an) average height of 10-12 metres. The boxwood groves are preserved in the valleys of the following rivers: The Zhoekvara, the Bzipi, the Gegi, the Ghalidzga, the Gumista. The top part of the Abkhazian mountain ranges is covered by Alpine grasslands [15].

The rich and multifarious natural landscapes define the diversity of fauna in Abkhazia. The red deer can be found in the Ritsa forests. There are West Caucasian turs and chamois in the subalpine and alpine zones. The forests are populated by fallow deer, bears, wolves, jackals, foxes, badgers, martens, squirrels, rabbits, etc. From the avifauna we should mention eagles, hawks, griffons, falcons, Caucasian snowcocks, pheasants, quails, thrushes, hoopoes, seagulls, etc. In the rivers and lakes are found trout, Colchic barbel, catfish, sometimes salmon and the Black Sea sturgeon. For the protection of the useful Flora and Fauna the Bichvinta-Myussera, Gumista, Ritsa-Avadhara, Pskhu State Reserves have been formed [16].

Abkhazia is rich in useful minerals. We have to mention Tkvarcheli and Bzipi coal deposits. There are also deposits of lead, zinc, copper, cobalt, baryte, dolomite, gypsum, limestone, clay etc. The valleys of the Kodori, the Sakeni, the Bzipi, and the Avadhara rivers are especially rich with mineral waters. There are thermal waters in the vicinity of Tkvarcheli, Sokhumi, Akhali Atoni, and Gagra. The gorgeous nature and unique mineral waters turn Abkhazia into the richest health resort and create great conditions for the development of tourism [17].

According to the 1989 census, the population of Abkhazia comprised of 525 061 people. Among them Georgians were 239 872 (45.7%), Abkhazs – 93 267 (17.8%), Armenians – 76 541 (14.6%), Russians – 74 914 (14.2%), Greeks – 14 664 (2.8%), other ethnical groups – 25 804 (4.9%) [18]. There were five administrative districts (Sokhumi, Gulripshi, Gali, Ochamchire, Gudauta), one territory subordinated

to the Gagra city council, seven cities (Sokhumi, Gali, Ochamchire, Gudauta, Akhali Atoni, Gagra, Tkvarcheli), and five urban-type settlements (Bzipi, Bichvinta, Gantiadi, Gulripshi, Myussera) in the Abkhazian Autonomous Republic in 1991 [19].

Sokhumi, the capital of the Autonomous Republic, is one of the ancient cities in Georgia. Toponym Sokhumi derives from the Georgian word Tskhomi/Tskhumi and means “hornbeam” [20]. It is mentioned as Dioskurias–Dioskuriada–Dioskuria in the ancient Greek sources [21]. According to the antique tradition, the name originated from the mythical Dioscuri brothers, although it is possible that the name of the town was the Greek comprehension of the old Georgian name since “dia” means “mother” and “skuri” means “water” in Megrelian [22]. In the 1st century B.C. the Romans named the town as Sebastopolis [23]. In the Georgian Medieval sources, the city is named Tskhomi or Tskhumi. The 12th century arab author Ibn al-azraq al-Fariqi is the first who mentions the city as “Sukhum” [24]. Ottoman Turks also called the city Sukhum or Sokhum [25]. The Turkish form became “Sokhumi” in Georgian and “Sukhum” in Russian. The Abkhaz name for the city is “Aqua.” For the first time, this name, in its Georgian form “Aqu,” is denoted on the territory of Sokhumi on the map of the Western Georgia composed at the royal court of Imereti Kingdom in 1737. It is interesting that next to it the “Tskhumi Fortress” is also designated [26]. In the 19th c. the Russians adopted the Turkish form “Sukhum-Kale” and were using it till 1920s. From 1936 they replaced the form “Sukhum” with “Sokhumi” [27].

Gagra is one of the most important resort centres in Abkhazia. In the Middle Ages it was called Gagari. This name means “narrow pass in the canyon” in Old Georgian. On the left bank of the river Bzipi, on Bichvinta cape, there is a resort city of the same name. There is a pine relict grove on the cape. The Georgian name of this tree-plant gave name of the settlement. The ancient Greeks took the Georgian “bichvi”-“pichvi” (Greek – “Pitios”) as Pitiunt [28]. Bichvinta is denoted in the form of “Petsonda” on the Italian naval maps of the 14-15th centuries. “Pitsunda,” the Russian and Abkhazian name of Bichvinta, has derived from it [29].

The city of Gudauta is located at the mouth of the River Gudow. This settlement emerged through the separation from the village of Likhni in the 1830s. The name derives from the name of the river on which it was built. Originally both the settlement and the river were called Gudava. (Gudow is an Abkhazian form of Gudava.)

Akhali Atoni (New Athos) is located at the mouth

of the River Psirtskha (“The River Anakopia” of the old). According to the 6th century Byzantine authors, the fortress-city of

Trachea was located in this place. Its name is a Greek translation of the old Georgian “Ughaghi”, which means (difficult to traverse, impassable place). It was called Anakopia in the Middle Ages. In historical sources, namely in “Kartlis Tskhovreba,” for the first time this name is mentioned in connection with the events of the 730s. From the beginning of the 19th century it was called Psirtskha (“river mouth” in Abkhazian), although some maps still mention the name Anakopia. In 1875, the Russian authorities opened a branch of the Russian monastery of St. Panteleimon on Mount Athos. The monastery received the name “Novi Afon” (New Athos).

Urban-type settlement Gulripshi is located on the left bank of the River Machara, at its mouth. It is mentioned in historical sources from the 1830s. The name in the Abkhazian language means “the Gulias’ dwelling, the Gulias’ water,” which indicates that the Georgian clan of Gulia lived there. At first the village was called Kvemo (Lower) Gulripshi, which was renamed as Gulripshi in 1975 and received the status of an urban-type settlement [30].

The city of Ochamchire is located southeast of Gulripshi, on the right bank of the River Ghalidzga, at its mouth. It was founded in the 1830s. The name derives from “Ochemchiri,” which means “vast field” in Megrelian. In the Ancient times, the Greek colony Gyenos was located in the vicinity of Ochamchire, at the mouth of the River Mokvi. In 1967 the form “Ochamchira” was officially adopted as the name of the city in Russian [31].

The city of Tkvarcheli is located at the source of the River Ghalidzga. The name is Georgian (Megrelian) and means “wooden staircase.” On the 17th c. Italian maps there is a settlement under the name “Tkvaia” (the Italian form of the Georgian toponym) in this place [32]. In the 1930s, in connection with the development of the coal industry, an urban-type settlement was established there. In 1942, the workers’ settlements of Tkvarcheli and Akarmara were separated from the Ochamchire district and the city of Tkvarcheli was created [33].

The most south-eastern city of the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia is Gali. It is located on both banks of the River Eristkali. In the Middle Ages, the village of Gogeli was located in this place. In this form the name appears on the Italian maps of the mid-17th century [34]. The village Gali is denoted on the 1861 map of Samegrelo. In 1886, the Samurzakano district included the Gali community with the villages of the First Gali and the Second Gali. “Gali” is derived

from “Ghali,” which means “brook” in Megrelian. In 1932, the urban-type settlement Gali was transformed into a city [35].

The indigenous population of Abkhazia consists of Georgians and Abkhazs. Abkhazian and Georgian languages belong to the Iberian-Caucasian language family, Georgian – to the Kartvelian language group, Abkhazian – to the North-Western or Abkhazian-Adyghe language group. The latter, along with Abkhazian, includes Abaza, Adyghe, Kabardian, and Ubykh languages, which are spoken by the kindred North Caucasian peoples: Abazins, Adygheans, Kabardians, Circassians [36]. Until the late Middle Ages, the Abkhazs were culturally and historically as Georgian as the population of other indigenous parts of Georgia (Kartlians, Kakhetians, Megrelians, Svans, etc.) and actively participated in the formation of the Georgian state and Georgian culture [37]. According to Niko Berdzenishvili, “Abkhazia was Georgia and Abkhaz was as Georgian, as Hereti and Heretian, as Kartli and Kartlian” [38]. In the late Middle Ages, the new groups of Abkhazian-Adyghe descent migrated from the mountains and the ethnic picture of Abkhazia changed significantly. As a result of the merging of the newly arrived Apsua-Abkhazs with the local population (“old” Abkhazians – cultural-historical Georgians and Colchis-Megrelians) the current Abkhazs were formed as an ethnos [39].

In Soviet times, Abkhazian language had the status of a state language. In this respect, Abkhazia was the only autonomous republic in the USSR where such a precedent existed. Currently, according to the Constitution of Georgia (Article 2), the state language of Georgia is Georgian, while, along with it, Abkhazian is also a state language in the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia.

After the restoration of Georgia’s independence on 9 April 1991, the Kremlin used the “Abkhaz nationalism” to punish Georgia. The military confrontation of 1992-1993, which was in fact a Russian-Georgian war, was its direct result. The consequences of the war were severe for both sides. According to the official version, up to 10 000 Georgians and up to 5 000 Abkhazs were killed in the hostilities. The separatists and their allies carried out the ethnic cleansing of the Georgian population. Up to 300,000 people living in Abkhazia, including more than 200,000 Georgians, have become the IDPs [40].

After the 1992-1993 military conflict, the separatist regime declared Abkhazia an independent republic. Despite the Russian Federation’s open military aggression against Georgia in August 2008 and the recognition of her separatist regions as “independent states,” the international community,

with the exception of a few states (Venezuela, Nauru, Nicaragua, Syria), unconditionally recognizes Georgian state jurisdiction over Abkhazia. According to the Georgian Constitution, Abkhazia is still considered an autonomous republic.

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БЕЖАН ХОРАВА**Доктор истории, профессор грузинского университета (Грузия)****АБХАЗИЯ.****КРАТКИЙ ИСТОРИКО-ГЕОГРАФИЧЕСКИЙ ОБЗОР****РЕЗЮМЕ**

В статье дается краткое историко-географическое описание Абхазии. В северо-западной части Грузии, на побережье Черного моря, между реками Ингури и Псоу, расположен один из уголков страны – Абхазия, являющаяся автономной республикой в составе Грузии. Река Псоу и главный Кавказский водораздельный хребет отделяют автономную республику от Российской Федерации, а река Ингури и отроги большого Кавказа – Кодорский и Абхазо-Сванетский хребты – от соседних грузинских регионов – Сванетии и Самегрело. Площадь Абхазии равняется 8,7 тыс. км². Столица автономной республики г. Сухуми является одним из самых древних и знаменитых городов Грузии.

Абхазия – страна гористая. 74% ее территории занимают горы и предгорья, остальную часть – равнины и низины. В Абхазии много озер: Рица, Адуэда Адзиж, Дериквара Адзиш, Квараш, Малая Рица, Амткел, Голубое озеро, Инкит, Бебесир, Папанцквили и др. Абхазия покрыта густой сетью рек Черноморского бассейна: Псоу, Бзыбь, Кодори, Гумиста, Келасури, Галидзга, Мокви, Ингури. Абхазия находится на самой северной границе субтропического пояса. Главный Кавказский водораздельный хребет защищает ее от холодных северных ветров. Теплое, никогда не замерзающее море и бурные горные реки создают мягкий, влажный субтропический климат. Значительная часть Абхазии, приблизительно 55%, покрыта лесами. Здесь распространено более 2 тыс. видов растений, включая 150 видов деревьев и кустарников. Остальные же представлены травянистыми формами. Здесь обитают виды животных, характерные как для равнины и горного леса, так и для высокогорья. Для охраны полезной флоры и фауны созданы Рицинско-Авадхарский, Псхувский, Пицундский, Гумистинский и Мюсерский заповедники. Великолепная природа и уникальные источники превращают Абхазию в богатейшую климатологическую здравницу.

Основным населением Абхазии являются грузины и абхазы. Абхазский язык входит в северо-западную, абхазо-адыгскую группу Иберийско-Кавказской языковой семьи. С этнокультурной точки зрения, до позднего средневековья абхазы были такими же грузинами, как и население других исторических провинций Грузии (картлийцы, кахетинцы, мегрелы, сваны и др.) и активно участвовали в формировании грузинской государственности и культуры. В позднем средневековье в результате натиска горцев – вторжений и целенаправленного переселения в Абхазию жителей горной зоны Западного Кавказа, произошли радикальные этнические изменения. В результате смешения пришлого горского и местного грузинского населения сформировался современный абхазский (апсуа) этнос. По переписи 1989 г. население Абхазии составляло 525.061 человек. Национальный состав был следующий: грузины – 239.872 (45,7%), абхазы – 93267 (17,8%), армяне – 76.541 (14,6%), русские – 74.914 (14,2%), греки – 14.664 (2,8%), остальные этнические группы - 25.804 (4,9%). По административно-территориальному делению 1991г. в Абхазскую Автономную Республику входят 5 административных районов – Гальский, Очамчирский, Гульрипшский, Сухумский, Гудаутский, а также подведомственная Гагринскому городскому совету территория; 7 городов Сухуми, Гагра, Гали, Гудаута, Ткварчели, Очамчире, Новый Афон, 5 поселка – Бзыпи, Гантиади, Гульрипши, Мюсера, Пицунда. В XV–II вв. до н.э.

территория нынешней Абхазии входила в состав Колхидского царства и полностью была населена племенами и общинами грузинского происхождения; во II-VIII вв. – в состав Эгрисского царства (Лазики); в IX–X вв. – в Западногрузинское царство, которое традиционно именуют «Царством абхазов» по названию его правящей династии. После объединения Грузии (XI), как эриставство входила в ее состав. В 70-90-е годы XV в. единое грузинское государство распадается и территория нынешней Абхазии вошла в Западногрузинское (Имеретинское) царство. В 50-х годах XVI в. Гурия, Одиши и Абхазия фактически отделились от Имеретинского царства. При решающей поддержке Османской империи абхазские князья на рубеже XVII–XVIII веков сумели расширить границу на юго-восток до р. Эгрисцкали (ныне Галидзга), а позднее - р. Ингури. В 1810г. Российская империя приняла Абхазское княжество (от р. Бзыбь до р. Галидзга, без Цебельды и других горских общин) под свое «покровительство», с целью его последующей оккупации и аннексии. В 1864г. Россия упразднила Абхазское княжество и включила территорию от р.Ингури до Гагры в Сухумский военный отдел, позже (1883г.) переименованный в Сухумский округ. Территория Абхазии почти в современных ее границах (исключая сектор Мехадыр-Псоу) впервые была официально названа «Абхазией» в мае 1919г., когда правительство независимой Грузинской Демократической Республики признало ее автономию и Абхазский Народный Совет принял специальное постановление о переименовании региона. Абхазская автономия в нынешних границах окончательно сформировалась в 1929 году, когда РСФСР вернула Грузинской ССР территорию между реками Мехадыр и Псоу. Во время войны 1992-1993 гг. Абхазия была оккупирована Российской Федерацией.