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**MULTICULTURAL GEORGIA: THE TERRITORIAL AND IDEOLOGICAL
FOUNDATION FOR CAUCASIAN UNITY**

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From ancient times, Georgia has been home to representatives of diverse ethnicities and ethnocultural groups. Periodic migrations of Greeks, Jews, Armenians, Persians, Turkmens, and others, along with centuries-long interactions with them, constitute one of the main trends in the development and building of nation-state of Georgia.

The first Greek settlements in Georgia are linked to the intensive colonization of the Black Sea coast by the Greeks (VIII-VI c. BC). Modern Greeks are primarily the so-called Pontian Greeks, who emigrated from the north-eastern regions of the Ottoman Empire. Their first settlements appeared in Georgia from the 18th century onwards (Kurshavishvili, 1959: 281-285, 297; Kaukhchishvili, 1942: 219-239; Pashaeva, Komakhia, (1), 2008: 149-162).

Ancient Georgian historiography associates the arrival of Jews in Georgia with the conquest and destruction of Jerusalem by King Nebuchadnezzar II of Babylon in 586 BC: "... King Nebuchadnezzar conquered and destroyed Jerusalem and Jews fled to Georgia" (Qartlis ckhovreba, 1955: 15). Subsequent waves of Jewish exiles came to Georgia, including after the siege of Jerusalem by Roman Emperor Vespasian in 70 AD. It appears that a Jewish colony existed in Mtskheta during the Hellenistic period from at least 169 BC (Melikishvili, 1970: 452-453; Davarashvili, Tsagareishvili, 2008: 90-103; Topchishvili, 2015: 183-184).

The Armenian population emerged in Georgia from the beginning of II century BC. Armenia and Georgia have had close relations since then. Armenian statehood was brought to an end in XI century, and by XVI-XVII centuries, historical Armenian territories were divided between Persia and the Ottoman Empire, leading many Armenians to seek refuge in Georgia due to national-political or religious persecution (Janiashvili, Komakhia, (1), 2008: 104-127;

Topchishvili, 2015: 184-188).

After the fall of the Byzantine Empire, Christian communities of the Near East, including Assyrians, considered Georgia their homeland. A small wave of Assyrians, persecuted by Muslims, must have settled in eastern Georgia during that period. In the second half of XVIII century, Assyrians fleeing the Near East were resettled in Kakheti by King Erekle II. Several more waves of Assyrians arrived in Georgia in XIX-XX centuries (Abashidze, Komakhia, 2008: 198-209).

After centuries-long relations with Persians, Arabs, and Turks, representatives of these peoples were coming to settle in Georgia. Kurds and Turkmens settled in Georgia during the late medieval period. Kurdish tribes appeared in southern part of Georgia, Meskheta, from XVI century. They were mostly Muslims. Some Kurdish people, namely Yazidis, were accepted by the Government of Georgia in 1918, during World War I (1914-1918) due to the fact that they were persecuted by the Turks and a part of the Muslim Kurds on religious and political grounds. From the early XVII century, Turkmen tribes (Borchalu, Hasanlu, Nasibu, Baidari, Demurchi-Hasanlu) settled in Kvemo Kartli and Kakheti. Later, they started to gradually integrate into the Georgian feudal system and have since actively participated in the life of the Georgian state (Pashaeva, Komakhia, (2), 2008: 163-173; Janiashvili, Komakhia, (2), 2008: 128-148).

Ethnic groups settled in Georgia preserved their languages, customs, traditions, and cultures. Georgia became their destination because they were well aware that they would not be deprived of their identities in this country. Alongside Georgian Orthodox churches, there have been synagogues, Armenian churches, mosques, and even a fire temple - Atashgah in Georgia (Religions in Georgia, 2008).

The Georgians enjoyed special relations with

Caucasian peoples.

In X-XIV centuries, Georgia had significant political and cultural influence over the peoples of the North Caucasus, such as people from Lesser Abkhazia (Abaza-Adyghe people), Kasogs (Circassians), Alans-Ossetians, Durdzuks (Vainakhs), Khunzakh people and the Lezgians (Avars and other peoples living in Dagestan). These peoples fell within Georgia's sphere of influence. The Georgian state sought to closely connect these peoples to Georgia by introducing them to and spreading the Georgian language, Christianity, and Georgian culture among them.

Following the devastating Mongol-Tatar and Tamerlane invasions in XIII-XIV centuries, the ethno-political situation in Fore-Caucasus changed dramatically. Indigenous populations were forced to cede the plains of Fore-Caucasus to the invaders and flee to the inaccessible to enemies and at the same time incommensurable mountains. "The population of Fore-Caucasus, suffering from the scarcity of resources in the incommensurable mountains, tried to occupy and settle in the Georgian lands at the foot of Greater Caucasus" (Berdzenishvili, 1940: 287). The raids of the Mongols and Tamerlane brought about disastrous consequences for Georgia: the country suffered dramatic casualties, cities and villages were devastated, and internal feudal conflicts exacerbated. In the second half of XV century, the Kingdom of Georgia fragmented into the kingdoms of Kartli, Kakheti, and Imereti, and the Principality of Samtskhe. In XV-XVI centuries, Georgia found itself bordered by extremely aggressive Muslim states: the Ottoman Empire from the southwest and Safavid Iran from the southeast. These powers fought for dominance in the Near East and for the conquest and subjugation of Georgia. Georgia became a battlefield of constant struggles. The resettlement of Caucasian highlanders - Vainakhs and Dagestanis - in Georgia took place in this period.

The migration of the Vainakhs to Georgia dates back to ancient times. According to «The Georgian Chronicles,» the second king of Kartli, Sauromaces, brought the Durdzuks and settled them in the country (Qartlis ckhovreba, 1955: 27). After the Mongol invasions in XIII century, the Vainakhs retreated to the mountains and mingled with the Georgian highlanders. Georgian highlanders—Mokheves, Mtiuls, Pshavs, Tushs, and Khevsurs - referred to their neighboring Chechens and Ingush as the Kists and their country as Kisteti (Shavkhelishvili,

1980: 68-72; Khangoshvili, 2005: 25, 240-248, 263). In XVIII-XIX centuries, the Vainakh tribe of the Kists settled in Georgia (Khangoshvili, 2005: 279, 300, 303). The Kists living in Georgia consider themselves Chechens, although they are from the mountainous region of modern Ingushetia, from the valley of the River Armkhi (Kistetistskali) (Khangoshvili, 2005: 25). The Kists living in Georgia have preserved their customs, language, and religion (Khangoshvili, 2005: 25; Albutashvili, 2005).

In the late Middle Ages, starting from XVII century, Dagestanis began to settle in Georgia.

The traditional Georgian name for the Dagestanis is the Lekians [the Lezgians]. In Georgian historical literature mountainous Dagestan, or Avaria, is referred to as Khundzeti/Ghundzeti, and its inhabitants, the Avars, are known as Khundzis/Ghunzis.

Starting from XVI century, Dagestan, which used to be under Georgian influence and subjugation, began to launch attacks against Georgia. Until the end of XVI century, the Kingdom of Kakheti managed to effectively repel them. Under these conditions, Dagestanis settled in the eastern part of Kakheti, historical Hereti, on the condition of serving the kings of Kakheti as serfs. King Levan of Kakheti (1520-1574) «brought the Lezgins and settled them in Pipineti» (Vakhushti Batonishvili, 1973: 575). Once the Lezgins settled there, Pipineti became known as Chari. Tired of economic hardship, Dagestani Lezgins would come to Kakheti, settle there and start serving some nobles as serfs. Meanwhile, episodic attacks by Dagestani people that began in XVI century intensified in XVII century. This process is known as Lekianoba*. These were small-scale attacks by Dagestanis on Georgia, aimed at looting property, livestock, crops, and taking people captive, and later at conquering settlements and levying tribute on the subjugated population. After the campaigns of Shah Abbas I of Persia in Georgia in the early XVII century, Lezgins began to settle on the deserted lands of eastern Kakheti. Gradually, the local Georgian population converted to Islam and became assimilated with the Lezgins, while others were sold as captives by the Lezgins. In XVIII century, Avar and Tsakhur Lezgins formed so called «free communities» of Chari, Belakani, Tali, Katekhi, Matsekhi, Mukhakhi, Mamrukhi,

* The term is derived from Leki, by which the Georgians knew the Lezgin people.

and Gogami, in eastern Kakheti (Berdzenishvili, 1966: 263-270; Botsvadze, 1968: 82-130).

It is noteworthy that Georgian feudal historiography viewed the Dagestani raids as a form of internal feud. According to the Georgian national concept, Lezgins were also considered Georgians, albeit ones who had deviated from Georgian customs. This is why King Alexander II of Kakheti (1574-1605) lamented the alienation of «serfs serving them for thousand years». The invasions of Lezgins were explained by cultural differences and the disruption of economic relations. According to Prince Vakhushti, all Caucasians were considered «Georgians.» In the Middle Ages, the term «Georgian» or «Georgian by kin» referred both to those who were ethnically Georgian and those who were culturally Georgian. Cultural Georgian identity did not imply the levelling of language, ethnicity, religion, customs, and traditions; on the contrary, protection and preservation of these cultural values was guaranteed within the Georgian state.

Today, Dagestanis still reside in Kakheti and have preserved their language, religion, customs, and traditions (Jalabadze, 2008: 174-183).

The beginning of the Ossetians movement into and the emergence of their first settlements in Georgia is linked to Mongol dominance in the North Caucasus. Ossetians appeared in Georgia in the 1270s and, with the help of the Mongols, attempted to settle there, occupying Gori and beginning to plunder and devastate Kartli. In the 1330s, King Giorgi the Brilliant of Georgia (1318-1346) defeated the Ossetians and drove them beyond the Caucasus Mountains (Лордкипанидзе, Отхмезури, 2015: 31).

Following the Mongol-Tatar and Tamerlane raids on the plains of Fore-Caucasus inhabited by the Ossetians, the Ossetians retreated to the Caucasus mountains. They fought for and occupied their new settlements west of the Terek River, exterminating or assimilating the local population, including the Georgian Dvali tribe, who lived in the upper reaches of the Ardoni River in the historical Georgian province of Dvaleti. Living in the mountains without access to the plains has never been possible; thus, the Ossetians, who were denied the access to the plains of Fore-Caucasus, gradually began to move into Shida Kartli and near the headwaters of the Rioni River tributaries (Лордкипанидзе, Отхмезури, 2015: 31-34; Гвасалиа, 2015: 59-62; Топчিশвили, 2015: 202-217).

The first Ossetian settlements in the

mountainous regions of Shida Kartli, at the sources of the Greater Liakhvi River, emerged in XVII century. «No Ossetians could be found in Upper Java,» notes a Georgian document of the 1660s (Dokumentebi, 1940: 364). Despite the developments, the process of resettlement of the Ossetians in Shida Kartli mainly proceeded peacefully. They would come as asylum seekers - whole families, or villages, and communities, settling in the estates of Georgian nobles as landless highlanders. Prince Vakhushti wrote about them: «As for the places, where the Ossetians are being registered, they had been initially settled with Georgian peasants. Later, the Ossetians were resettled in these places, and the Georgians moved to the plains, as the plains were depopulated due to invading enemies» (Vakhushti Batonishvili, 1973: 363-364).

Georgians and Ossetians generally enjoyed peaceful co-existence, disputing only with their landlords and demanding a reduction in feudal duties.

In the late Middle Ages, Ossetian literary language was Georgian, and they were educated mainly in this language. The situation changed after Russia conquered Georgia in XIX century, making Russian the language of education for Ossetians, which was accompanied by other negative consequences.

The term «Ossetia» first appears as the name for the mountainous areas settled by Ossetians in the valleys of Greater and Lesser Liakhvi Rivers in a report to the Russian Emperor dated March 26, 1802, by Governor General of Georgia, Karl Knorring. Subsequently, in the period of 1802-1837, in various reports by different representatives of Russian Empire, the mountainous region of the Liakhvi River settled by Ossetians was often referred to as «Грузинская Осетия» [«Georgian part of Ossetia»], «Карталинская Осетия» [«part of Ossetia situated in Kartli»]. Since 1830, the binary terms: «Южная Осетия» [«South Ossetia»] and «Северная Осетия» [«North Ossetia»] became established, and in 1842, «Осетинский округ» [«District of Ossetia»] was created in the territory of Georgia (Songhulashvili, 2009: 86-87); Лекишвили, 2015: 206-218).

In 1918, Georgia regained its independence and established the Democratic Republic of Georgia. A faction of the Ossetians, forming the «National Council of Ossetians,» demanded cultural autonomy from the Government of Georgia. The Government of the Democratic

Republic of Georgia was willing to grant local autonomy to the Ossetians and was prepared to create Java District, where the Ossetian language would be used alongside the Georgian language and the language of school education could be optional - Georgian or Ossetian. However, the Ossetians refused to accept the offer, as they wanted Russian-language schools. The Government of Georgia planned to let the Ossetians decide the issue related to Java District and the Ossetian cultural autonomy through a democratic survey, but was overthrown before being able to implement the plan.

Ossetian Bolsheviks fought to make the lands inhabited by the Ossetians part of Soviet Russia. The first uprising occurred in February 1918, during the rule of the Transcaucasian Sejm. Later, the Caucasus Regional Committee of the Russian Communist Party established the South Ossetian Revolutionary Committee (Revcom) in Vladikavkaz on March 23, 1920, tasking it with organizing an uprising against the Democratic Republic of Georgia. In April 1920, an uprising began in the upper reaches of the Liakhvi River, involving units from the North Caucasus. The rebels captured Tskhinvali and declared the Republic of Ossetia, requesting being included in Soviet Russia. The North Caucasian units treated the local Georgian population violently; therefore, when the Georgian authorities recaptured Tskhinvali and expelled the Bolshevik forces, some Ossetians fled with them, fearing retribution (Лордкипанидзе, Отхмезури, 2015: 39-42; Джанелидзе, (1), 2010: 366-381).

In February 1921, units of the Russian Red Army captured Tbilisi. On March 5, Red Army units, led by Ossetian Bolsheviks, entered Tskhinvali. The South Ossetian Revolutionary Committee (Revcom) raised the issue of creating an Autonomous Republic of Ossetia before the Georgian Revolutionary Committee (Revcom). Ossetian Bolsheviks claimed a number of Georgian and Georgian-Ossetian villages in addition to Tskhinvali. On July 20, 1921, the Government of the Georgian SSR declared Java the administrative centre of South Ossetia, but with the support of the Caucasus Bureau of the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party, the South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast was established on April 20, 1922, with Tskhinvali as its centre. The Oblast covered 3,800 square kilometers, including not only the northern part of Shida Kartli but also the middle and upper reaches of the Ksani, Lekhura, Greater and

Lesser Liakhvi rivers, the upper reaches of the Prone River, a significant part of the Ptsi River Valley, and the sources of the Kvirila and Dzirula rivers (Тоидзе, 2015: 231-246; Джанелидзе, (2), 2010: 366-381). Later, many Ossetians dispersed and settled throughout almost all of Georgia.

Thus, the situation created in Shida Kartli in XIX century laid the groundwork for naming the territorial-administrative unit created by the Bolsheviks «South Ossetia.» It is noteworthy that South Ossetia was created at a time when no Ossetian administrative-political unit existed in the North Caucasus. The North Ossetian ASSR was established only in 1924 (Лордкипанидзе, Отхмезури, 2015: 41).

The Abkhazians mainly live in the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia. The contemporary Abkhazians (Apsua) belong to the Abkhaz-Adyghe ethnic group. Their language, Abkhazian, belongs to the Northwest Caucasian branch of the Ibero-Caucasian language family.

Until the late Middle Ages, Abkhazians were ethnoculturally similar to the populations of other historical provinces of Georgia and actively participated in the formation of the Georgian state and culture. In the late Middle Ages, the resettlement of mountain-dwellers (Apsua) from the western Caucasus in Abkhazia led to significant ethnic changes in the region. The modern Abkhazian ethnic group emerged as a result of the amalgamation of these mountain-dwellers and the local Georgian population (Beradze, Khorava, 2007: 7).

Apart from the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia, a small number of Abkhazians (about 2,000 people) have lived in Batumi and its surroundings (in the Autonomous Republic of Adjara) since their deportation by Russian authorities in 1864. These Abkhazians living in Adjara have preserved their customs, language, and religion.

Starting from XIX century, with the establishment of Russian rule in Georgia, the process of separating the Abkhazians from Georgia and the Georgian ethno-cultural world has been underway. Russia began to cultivate a pro-Russian intelligentsia in Abkhazia and to instil anti-Georgian sentiments among the Abkhazians. There were attempts to undermine the cultural-historical unity between the Georgians and the Abkhazians, particularly targeting the Georgian language, which formed the basis of this unity. This objective was furthered by introduction of church Slavonic as the language of church

services in Abkhazian churches, as well as by establishing a Cyrillic-based script for written Abkhazian language in 1862 (Khorava, 2007: 256-257). This script was intended not for cultural but political purposes, as recognized by Russian officials. E. Weidenbaum, a member of the Caucasus Viceroyalty, wrote: «The Abkhazian language, which has no script or literature, is doomed to disappear sooner or later. The question is, which language will replace it? We should ensure that cultural ideas and concepts should be disseminated not in Georgian, but in Russian. Therefore, I believe that the establishment of the Cyrillic-based Abkhazian script should be treated not as an end in itself but as a means to weaken the use of the Georgian language at church and schools and gradually replace it with the state language» (Анчабадзе, 1970: 96).

After Georgia regained its independence in 1918, the newly elected People's Council of Abkhazia adopted an Act on Autonomy on March 20, 1919 (Гамахария, Гогия, 1997: 435). This act allowed Abkhazia to join the Democratic Republic of Georgia with the right of autonomous conduct of local affairs.

Following the Soviet Russia's occupation and annexation of Georgia in February-March 1921, separatism movement significantly intensified. Abkhazians and Ossetians were granted the right to autonomous governance, which served as an obstacle to the National Liberation Movement in Georgia and Georgia's exit from the Soviet Union. Additionally, this autonomy was a tool for Russification. For Abkhazians and Ossetians, the Russian language became the language of education, culture, literacy, communication, and public affairs.

Georgia was the hub of a unified Caucasian geo-civilization, and the Georgian culture was the foundation of the idea of the Caucasian Unity. The Georgian language and Orthodox Christianity formed the historical mortar that helped to keep together a multicultural but, from the viewpoint of civilization, a unified complex in the Caucasus. Therefore, the peoples of the Caucasus never ceased striving to establish close political and cultural relations with Georgia.

In 1920, the ruler of Avaria, Kaitmaz Alikhanov, applied to the Government of Georgia with a request to incorporate his country into Georgia. On June 2, he wrote to Evgeni Gegechkori, Foreign Minister of the Democratic Republic of Georgia: «The bloody chaos brought to the North Caucasus first by the volunteers and

then by the Bolsheviks has dragged the people of Dagestan, the Avars, into a vicious circle... The Avars, who see and understand all this, on the one hand, and on the other hand, do not forget that Avaria was an inseparable part of Georgia before the invasions of Tamerlane from Samarkand, look at the Georgian people through hopeful eyes... To this end, a meeting of all influential figures of Avaria was held under my chairmanship. The participants of this meeting concluded to address Georgia, asking it to accept Avaria as part of Georgia on autonomous principles, meaning that foreign policy, military affairs, finances, and education should be common, while our self-government and judicial matters should be based on Sharia» (Central Historical Archive of Georgia, f. 1864, c. 25; Джавахишвили, 2005: 40-41).

Kaitmaz Alikhanov was sent to Tbilisi to inform the Government of Georgia about the «will of Avar people and to learn about the viewpoint of Georgian people on this matter.» However, the Government of Georgia failed to fulfil the Avars' request at that time.

In 1920-1922, the Udi ethnic group relocated from Azerbaijan to Georgia due to prolonged feud between the Azerbaijanis and the Armenians. Udi people are considered one of the surviving tribes of Albania. Currently, they live in the village of Zinobiani (Kvareli Municipality) in Georgia and in the villages of Vartashen and Nij in Azerbaijan. The Udis who settled in Georgia have preserved their native language, Orthodox Christianity, and traditions (Jeiranishvili, 1971: 5-6; Sharabidze, Komakhia, 2008: 210-222).

In January 1925, the first Congress of Soviets of North Ossetia considered the issue of unifying the two Ossetias by joining Georgia. On July 15, 1925, at the session of the Central Executive Committee of the Georgian SSR, Chairman of the North Ossetian Autonomous Oblast Executive Committee, A. Takoev, addressed the audience and, in his brief speech, noted that supporting this issue would be an indicator of the «correct and sound resolution of the painful national question» of the Ossetians. The session adopted a resolution on the unification of South and North Ossetia, but owing to Moscow's intervention, this plan remained unrealized (Songhulashvili, 2009: 124-126).

Georgia has always been a source of hope during the political unrest among the Caucasian peoples. In March 1930, an anti-Soviet uprising began in Didoeti, Dagestan. Dido (Tsez) people

were dissatisfied with their cultural and socio-economic conditions under the Russian SFSR, exacerbated by the forced pace of collectivization. One of the rebels' demands was joining Georgia. Dido (Tsez) people blocked entrances to Didoeti. The authorities responded by isolating the region with military units and securing the roads and mountain passes leading to Georgia and north-eastern part of Dagestan. On April 7, 1930, a secret telegram was sent from Makhachkala to Moscow, signed by A. I. Muravyov, Secretary of the Dagestan Regional Committees of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks), and I. V. Korkmasov, Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars of the Dagestan ASSR. The telegram read: «The rebels sent a delegation to Tbilisi to negotiate the unification of Didoeti with Georgia.» A delegation of Dido (Tsez) people travelled to Tbilisi, expressing the people's desire for 40 Dido villages to join Georgia (Россия XX век. Лубянка, 2003: 241-242, 243).

The Political Bureau (Politburo) of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks) adopted a special resolution on April 10, 1930, «On the Didoeti District.» The authorities rejected the proposal of the Dagestan Regional Committee to take military and political measures to suppress the uprising in Didoeti and instead opted for a gradual suppression by isolating the area from the outside world and causing internal decay (Россия XX век. Лубянка, 2003: 243).

On October 12, 1943, the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR abolished the Karachay Autonomous Oblast. On November 2, 1943, the Karachay people were deported, followed by the deportation of the Chechens and Ingush from the Chechen-Ingush ASSR on February 23, 1944, and the Balkars from the Kabardino-Balkar ASSR on March 8-10, 1944, to the Soviet republics in Central Asia and Kazakhstan (Россия XX век. Сталинские депортации, 2003: 389, 438).

The Uchkulansky District of the former Karachay Autonomous Oblast and part of the Mikoyanovsky District were transferred to the Georgian SSR. A new administrative unit, the Klukhorsky District, was established in the territory, with its center in the town of Klukhori (Natmeladze, Daushvili, 2004: 235; Beradze, Topuria, Sanadze, Khorava, 2013: 110). On March 7, 1944, the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR abolished the Chechen-Ingush ASSR. Part of the lands belonging to

the autonomous republic was transferred to the Georgian SSR: the Itum-Kalinsky District was renamed Akhalkhevi District, and some of its lands became part of the Kazbegi District. The lands of the former Chechen-Ingush ASSR were also distributed among the Stavropol Krai, the Dagestan ASSR, and the North Ossetian ASSR. Thus, the Georgian SSR received part of the Jeirakh Valley (the Armkhi River Valley or Kistetistskali) and part of the Assa River Valley, as well as part of the Argun River Valley (Itum-Kalinsky District). Approximately 25,000-35,000 Ossetians and Georgians resettled from the territory of Georgia in the former Ingush territories. On April 8, 1944, the Kabardino-Balkar Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR) was renamed to the Kabardian ASSR. After the deportation of the Balkars, their lands, including the southwestern part of the Elbrusky and Nagorny districts, were annexed to the Zemo Svaneti District of the Georgian SSR. Over 5,000 Georgians were resettled in the Klukhorsky District from the regions of Georgia, which suffered from a shortage of usable land area, such as mountainous regions of Racha and Svaneti (Россия XX век. Сталинские депортации, 2003: 439; Natmeladze, Daushvili, 2004: 232-236; Lobzhanidze, 2005).

On March 10, 1955, the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Georgian SSR issued a resolution transferring the territory of the Klukhorsky District to the Russian SFSR. Other annexed lands were also transferred from the Georgian SSR to the Russian SFSR. On December 11, 1957, a law was issued confirming the resolution of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Georgian USSR on the restoration of national autonomies for Balkar, Chechen, Ingush, and Karachay peoples.

Thus, in 1957, the Karachays, Balkars, Chechens, and Ingush returned to their homelands. The Georgians warmly welcomed them and peacefully transferred the lands to their original owners, assisting them in settling down, generously leaving behind well-maintained yards, gardens, livestock, and provisions. The Georgians respected the cultural monuments and tended to the graves of ancestors of the original owners of the lands. Notably, during this period, Georgians did not bury their deceased in foreign lands. All this fostered goodwill towards the Georgians among the peoples of the Caucasus (Lobzhanidze, 2005: 73, 461-465, 473-476; Eradze, 2009).

In early 1991, the Ingush public-political organization «Niiskho» (Justice) led debates with the participation of broader public and concerning the issue of whether Ingushetia should remain as part of Chechnya in a single republic, create an autonomous republic within the Russian SFSR, or join Georgia. It is worth noting that the leader of «Niiskho,» Isa Koazoy (Kodzoev), attended a meeting held in Kazbegi on March 23, 1991, between Boris Yeltsin, Chairman of the Supreme Soviet of the Russian SFSR, and Zviad Gamsakhurdia, Chairman of the Supreme Council of the Republic of Georgia. Yeltsin made a special trip to Ingushetia and promised the Ingush his support for the creation of an Ingush ASSR within the Russian SFSR, the adoption of a special law on the rehabilitation of repressed peoples, which would consider the Ingush's interests. Consequently, the Republic of Ingushetia was established within the Russian Federation (as reported by M. Chukhua). On April 26, 1991, the Supreme Soviet of the Russian SFSR adopted the law «On the Rehabilitation of Repressed Peoples,» which included provisions for the rehabilitation of repressed peoples and the «restoration of territorial integrity» of the repressed peoples. However, the provisions of the law, specifically regarding the «restoration of territorial integrity,» were not implemented for the Ingush (Анчабадзе, 2002: 110).

In 2010, Dido (Tsez) people repeatedly requested to join Georgia. In December, 2010, during his visit to Georgia, a representative of Dido (Tsez) people, Mohammed Ramzanov, voiced this request while addressing the members of the Diaspora and Caucasus Issues Committee of the Parliament of Georgia. Dido (Tsez) people were dissatisfied with their cultural and socio-economic situation within the Russian Federation. According to Mohammed Ramzanov, approximately 40,000 Dido (Tsez) people lived in Didoeti, and 15,000 of them had signed the request for their territories to become part of Georgia. He presented this documentation to the Parliament of Georgia (<http://1tv.ge/ge/news/view/20953.html>), confirming that the majority of adult Dido people desired to join Georgia. However, no decision acceptable to Dido (Tsez) people could be made. Shortly after returning home, Mohammed Ramzanov was murdered.

Despite North Caucasians' active support of the separatists during the 1992-1993 War in Abkhazia, the enemy image of Abkhazians, Adyghe (Circassians), Chechens, or Dagestanis

have never been present among the Georgians (the Ingush, Balkars, and Karachays did not participate in this conflict). Notably, in recent times, the attitude of North Caucasians towards Georgians has radically changed for the better: Chechens have become more benevolent towards Georgians, often expressing sentiments such as «no other nation in the world has ever been closer to us than Georgians.» A similar attitude exists among Circassians. Traditionally, the Ingush and Karachay-Balkars have been well-disposed towards the Georgians.

For centuries, Georgia, as a unique bridge between civilizations, has been distinguished by ethnic and religious tolerance. There has never been a recorded conflict on religious or ethnic grounds in the history of Georgia. As for the conflicts in Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region, it is clear that they were instigated from outside by the country that occupied these regions. The Abkhazians and the Ossetians had all conditions for preserving and developing their national culture within Georgia, but they chose a different path. Despite Kremlin-supported Abkhazian and Ossetian separatism, the peoples of the Caucasus have never stopped viewing Georgia as a guarantor for the preservation of their ethnic, linguistic, and religious identities and supporting their cultural and socio-economic development. Hence, the Avars (1920), North Ossetians (1925), Ingush (1991), and Dido (Tsez) people (1930, 2010) sought to join Georgia, seeing in this step a guarantee for preserving their national identity.

Despite the physical-geographical, ethnic, linguistic, and religious-cultural diversity, the Caucasus remains a unified geographical and cultural-civilizational entity. This perspective often raises questions, especially considering the history of the region replete with internal conflicts, tensions between autochthonous and migrant ethnic groups, active armed involvement of North Caucasians and their support for the separatists during the 1992-1993 War in Abkhazia, territorial crises between Armenia and Georgia and Armenia and Azerbaijan, the clash of seemingly incompatible «values,» etc.

In spite of the fact that the region is characterized by ethnic heterogeneity and a multi-layered historical, cultural and religious structure, this diversity provides a fundamental foundation for a continuum of common Caucasian historical-cultural roots and values, which serves as the basis for the idea of Caucasian unity across all epochs and geopolitical structures.

The unity of the Caucasus can be viewed through the lens of geo-civilization. Geo-civilization is defined as a local, regional historical-cultural system, bound together by fundamental values inherent to the ethnic groups living and states existing in that region. Geo-civilization is also a variable of geopolitical analysis, where the emphasis is placed on the common genetic origin and geo-cultural and spatial-territorial "bonds."

The concept of the Caucasus is tied to the idea of a certain unity that stands above its constituent nations and relevant states, languages, or religions. Thus, it represents a supranational, supra-confessional, and supra-state unity, which should establish its identity in relation to the «non-Caucasian.»

«Caucasia» was first and foremost created within the «Caucasian ideology,» in the understanding of the Iberian-Caucasian unity. Iberian-Caucasian ideology is the realization of the idea of Caucasian unity. Therefore, the Caucasus is primarily an idea. The idea of the Caucasus has proven to be robust and historically stable, as it has withstood numerous attacks, from nomadic barbarian invasions to Russian imperialism. The resistance against these attacks had been generated by the Iberian-Caucasian ideology and the common historical memory of the Caucasian peoples and ethnic groups.

The core idea of Iberian-Caucasian ideology and common Caucasian historical memory lies in the belief that Caucasians share a common genetic origin and a single line of historical development. This concept has linguistic, ethno-genetic, anthropological, and historical layers that together form a single structure: the connection between Kartvelian, Abkhaz-Adyghe, and Nakh-Dagestanian language systems and a common lexical fund; the genetic kinship of indigenous ethnic groups; racial-anthropological unilateralism, expressed in the Mediterranean race being part of the Balkan-Caucasian type (with local anthropological subtypes - such as Adyghe, Western Caucasian, and Pre-Asian subtypes - showing varying degrees of difference); convergence of major trends in historical development and shared historical fate. These are the foundations for Caucasian unity and identity. Medieval Georgian historical ideology is focused on these foundations. Although its basis is mythology, myths and mythologemes capture the rational layers of real historical development present in the consciousness of a given people; in a certain sense, a myth conveys real historical

tradition in an idealized form.

According to XI-century Georgian chronicler Leonti Mroveli, «the Armenians, Georgians, Ransians and Movkanians, Hers and Lekians, Megrelians, and Caucasians are all descended from a common ancestor - Targamos» (Qartlis ckhovreba, 1955: 3). This is a genealogical scheme of the kinship of the native Caucasian ethnic groups, based on the genetic kinship between the personified origins of these ethnic groups, or ethnarchs. Leonti Mroveli tried to establish the metahistorical foundation of Caucasian unity using mythology, to find the substrate phenomenon of the Caucasian image — Targamos, the common eponym and ethnarch of the Caucasian ethnic groups. This genealogical scheme adequately reflects the common Iberian-Caucasian origin and its genetic projection in historical memory: a common ethnarch and the construction of a hierarchy of eponym-ethnarchs based on their kinship, i.e., the principle of a common house in the genetic matrix.

It is notable that the genetic kinship of Georgians and autochthonous Caucasians is confirmed using modern scientific methods. The Caucasian linguistic-ethnic unity is evidenced by archaeological and linguistic materials (Chukhua, 2012: 126-147).

One more essential trend in Georgian historical ideology, explained by academician Niko Berdzenishvili through theoretical attribution to «The Georgian Chronicles» - a principal source of the history of ancient and medieval Georgia and the peoples of the Caucasus - highlights an important point: every war between the ethnic groups and states of the Caucasus in «The Georgian Chronicles» is viewed as an internal war. Consequently, according to the Georgian ideology of that time, none of the armed conflicts among the subjects within the intra-Caucasian space was considered an inter-ethnic or interstate conflict.

In both cases, the projection of Iberian-Caucasian ideology in historiography is clear, and it adequately, deeply, and vividly reflects the spiritual-cultural layers of the existence of a unity.

The Iberian-Caucasian ideology represents the foundational idea of the geo-civilization of the Caucasus, which is based on the archetype or the primal fore-image of Caucasian unity. Due to its archetypal nature, this ideology also functions as a certain supra-ideological concept, placing it even above religious ideology. Every

Caucasian or Caucasian ethnic group, despite certain ethnocentrism and differences in religions and the patterns of thinking, identifies themselves with the common Caucasian culture.

The first signs of discord among the Caucasians were associated with Islamic aggression and the Islamization of ethno-cultural systems in different sectors of the Caucasian space. The first wave of Islamization led to the fragmentation and Turkification of the Albanian ethnos; the second - Mongol-Tamerlane-Ottoman - wave resulted in the Islamization of the North Caucasus; the third wave, in the form of Turkification, led to the Islamization of the Georgian-Laz ethno-cultural zone in the eastern part of Asia Minor, resulting in the separation of the Pontic-Cappadocian sector from the single Caucasian proto-civilizational space.

The history of Caucasian geo-civilization holds a completely unique and qualitatively distinct period spanning nearly five centuries. In XI-XV centuries, the Caucasus was a single geo-civilizational complex having its roots in the religious-cultural and political hegemony of Georgia. This development - the establishment of a Georgia-centered geopolitical and geo-cultural geopolitical landscape in the Caucasus - had objective prerequisites. The most crucial factor was Georgia's central location in the Caucasus. Georgia is the centre of the Caucasus, functioning as the «geographical hub» or «hub area» of the Caucasus. This reality, in the realms of history, used to determine Georgia's strategic position in the Caucasian space during the formation of any geopolitical landscape, and especially of a distinctly Caucasian order.

Georgia's functioning as a hub was most prominently reflected in the political-geographical dynamics of the Caucasus region in XI-XV centuries. In XI-XIII centuries, Georgia controlled (regardless of the differences between David the Builder's annexation tactics and King Tamar's vassal-tributary tactics, as the focus here is on civilizational rather than political boundaries) almost all of Armenia (including the territory of Northern Armenia, the former Kingdoms of Vanand and Shirak, and the southern part of the former Kingdom of Tashir-Dzoraget, which was under direct control of the Georgian monarchy), the kingdoms of Shirvan and Arran in Azerbaijan, and the entire horizontal belt of the North Caucasus (Lesser Abkhazia (Georgian: Jiqeti), Adygea-Cherkessia (Georgian: Kashageti), Alania-Ossetia, Durzuket, Ghunzeti, Leketi, and

Darubandi (Derbend and its area)), which also functioned as a buffer against the formation of Turkish geopolitical landscape of Kipchakia.

The first crack in this system was introduced by the Mongols. Only Armenian communities remained under Georgian influence, while Arran-Shirvan became part of the Ilkhanate. During the reigns of Giorgi the Brilliant (1318-1346) and Alexander I the Great (1412-1442), the Caucasian geo-civilization was almost fully restored within its previous boundaries.

The aggression of Tamerlane and the Ottomans resulted in a large-scale geopolitical transition in the Caucasus region. The weakening and subsequent disintegration of Georgia in the second half of XV century led to the loss of its function as a hub. As a result, the Caucasian space transformed into a chaotic-turbulent area with significant disintegration processes. Additionally, the Islamization of the North Caucasus, which started in XIV century, and the association of this religious factor with the pan-Turkic geopolitical interests of the Ottoman Empire, led to the crisis of Caucasian identity.

In XV-XVI centuries onward, Islam became a cultural-civilizational factor in the North Caucasus. According to Prince Teimuraz, «The Ghlighvs, Durdzuks, Lekians, and others were Christians and spoke the Georgian language... Tamerlane, after having conquered them, commissioned Arab mullahs... to teach their children to write and speak Arabic, forbidding them to read and study Georgian books» (Botsvadze, 1968: 19). However, Islam failed to change the culture, traditions, and ethnopsychology of the indigenous ethnic groups of the Caucasus. In their ideology, national and common Caucasian awareness dominates over religious awareness. Islam managed to only superficially change traditional Caucasian ethno-cultures but failed to reach the deeper layers. As K. Z. Gamsakhurdia observed, «Customs were so strong here that even during the period of Shamil's Imamate, they competed with 'Sharia'—Islamic law» (Gamsakhurdia, 1997: 139).

Thus, Caucasian identity was preserved despite the spread of Islam. The dissemination of Islam weakened the Caucasian ideology but failed to completely destroy it. The Caucasus geo-civilization represents a cultural-historical unity with a shared cultural-genetic code and awareness of being «Caucasian.»

Georgia's function as a hub in the Caucasus, from the perspective of specific geopolitical and

geostrategic parameters, can be grouped into three main blocks: (1) Geopolitical Sovereignty: Georgia is the main source of the Caucasian geopolitical sovereignty, as without Georgia, each territorial sector of the region automatically becomes an enclosed enclave. For example, the North Caucasian sector gets «locked» between Russia and Georgia, Azerbaijan - between Georgia and Iran, and Armenia - between Georgia and Turkey. Only Georgia, with its access to the Black Sea, provides an alternative to the isolation and enclosure of these areas; (2) Intra-Caucasian Integration: Georgia is one of the sources of intra-Caucasian integration, as this integration is possible only through its territory; (3) Cultural-Civilizational Unity: As a country located in the middle of the region, only Georgia can create a culturally unified space in the Caucasus, forming a unique common-Caucasian complex based on shared cultural values, Caucasian ideology, and common political interests.

The realization of this functional triad and the creation of a Georgia-centered geo-civilization in the Caucasus began in X-XI centuries with a series of events, such as the missionary activities of the Georgian Church in the North Caucasus, the incorporation of Armenian political units by Byzantium (eliminating an intra-Caucasian rival for the hegemony of the Georgian Monarchy), and the expansion by the Seljuk Turks (creating favourable conditions for establishing control in the South Caucasus using anti-Seljuk ideology). The culmination of this process occurred during the reigns of David the Builder, George III, and King Tamar. The classical formulation of its conceptual understanding by the Georgian elite is expressed in the following words of King Tamar's chronicler: «This is witnessed by the Houses of Shirvanshah, Darubandians, Ghundzis, Osetians, Kashags, Durdzüks, the city of Karnu, and Trapezuntine, who lived in freedom and were protected from enemies» (Qartlis ckhovreba, 1959: 147). This formulation provided by XIII-century Georgian chronicler implies «living in freedom» as the cultural independence of the peoples of the Caucasus and «protection from enemies» as protection from the aggression of foreign geopolitical forces.

Although almost the entire Caucasus fell under the influence of the Georgian monarchy, the central unifying trends implied not political conquest but the awareness of Iberian-Caucasian unity, anti-Seljuk ideology, and the dissemination of the elements of Georgian culture—Christianity,

the Georgian language, and Georgian script — which were considered as common and thus completely acceptable to all Caucasian ethnic groups.

Therefore, Georgia-centered integration was a fully conscious and acceptable phenomenon for the Caucasus, not a sociocultural stress imposed by a foreign element, as was the case during the policies of conquest implemented by Tamerlane, the Ottoman Empire, and the Russian Empire. The process of building the geo-civilization of the Caucasus was Georgia-centered, not pancultural or nationalist. The major intention of the process was not the Georgianization of the Caucasus, the absorption of the individuality and identity of various ethnic groups by Georgia, but their unification around the Georgian territorial-political and religious hub while preserving their own languages, traditions, and customs. To use classical culturological terms, this was intra-Caucasian acculturation, a process of adaptation of individual ethno-cultural units of the Caucasus to the dominant Georgian culture, rather than their cultural identity being absorbed by inculturation. Every ethno-culture preserved their «soul»—the essence of culture and individual style, together with their capabilities to regulated their own norms and values.

Thus, Georgia-centrism should be understood as a non-imperial (even anti-imperial) ideological concept, which considers Georgia as the hegemon of the ideological-cultural process of the Caucasus and the centre of geo-civilization, viewing this assertion as a completely natural and a priori determined worldview.

The Caucasian geo-civilization is the space of influence of Georgian culture, its vital realm of geopolitical and cultural-civilizational interests. Georgia, in turn, is the system-forming country of this geo-civilization, and its weakening or disintegration, or the loss of its function of a hub, is equivalent to the destruction of the entire geo-civilization. This was the dominant understanding during the reigns of David the Builder and King Tamar, and we should have the similar understanding of the issue.

Beginning from XV century, the disintegration of Caucasian geo-civilization and the negative transformation of the Georgia-centered geopolitical landscape was underway in the region. This laid the foundation for a new geopolitical era in the history of Casasia, which can be called the «geopolitical era of Amasya.» The Amasya Treaty, signed between Iran and the

Ottoman Empire in 1555, for the first time on the international arena, marked the division of the large part of the Caucasus and its transformation into a battleground for the geopolitical giants of that time.

The «geopolitical era of Amasya» was followed by the dominance of the Russian Empire in the region. Although the Caucasus was restored as a political unity, unlike the Georgia-centered unity, this was a territorial-administrative unity with the status of a colony of the Russian Empire, formed within the frame of Russian-imperial unification. The new geopolitical arrangement of the Caucasus was accompanied by highly negative and purely anti-Caucasian phenomena — the abolition of all local unions, the genocide of part of the indigenous ethnic groups and the expulsion of some to the Ottoman Empire, the Slavic-Cossack colonization of certain parts of the region to create a supportive population

along the southern border of the Empire, the encouragement of Armenian immigration, and the formation of Armenian demographic enclaves there, etc.

The «geopolitical era of Amasya» continues to date. A significant part of the Caucasus is within the Russian Federation and Turkey, while the states located within the internal space of the Caucasus have diametrically opposite geopolitical interests, including the incompatibility of their foreign orientation vectors.

Over the past century and more, there have been numerous attempts to abolish the «geopolitical era of Amasya» and restore the Georgia-centered geo-civilization of the Caucasus. Almost every project developed within this framework has been ideologically and conceptually based on the «idea of the Caucasian Unity.»

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БЕЖАН ХОРАВА**Доктор исторических наук, профессор, Университет Грузии (Грузия)****ДАЗМИР ДЖОДЖУА****Доктор исторических наук, ассоциированный профессор Сухумского государственного университета (Грузия)****МУЛЬТИКУЛЬТУРНАЯ ГРУЗИЯ: ТЕРРИТОРИАЛЬНАЯ И ИДЕОЛОГИЧЕСКАЯ ОСНОВА КАВКАЗСКОГО ЕДИНСТВА****Резюме**

С древнейших времен Грузия была домом для представителей различных этнических и этнокультурных групп. Периодические миграции греков, евреев, армян, персов, туркмен и других, а также многовековое взаимодействие с ними, составляют одну из основных тенденций развития и строительства национального государства Грузии.

Первые греческие поселения в Грузии связаны с интенсивной колонизацией побережья Черного моря греками (VIII-VI вв. до н. э.). Современные греки — это в первую очередь так называемые понтийские греки, эмигрировавшие из северо-восточных регионов Османской империи. Их первые поселения в Грузии появились с XVIII века.

Древняя грузинская историография связывает прибытие евреев в Грузию с завоеванием и разрушением Иерусалима царем Вавилона Навуходоносором II в 586 г. до н. э.: «...Царь Навуходоносор завоевал и разрушил Иерусалим, и евреи бежали в Грузию». Последующие волны еврейских изгнанников пришли в Грузию, в том числе после осады Иерусалима римским императором Веспасианом в 70 г. н. э. Похоже, что еврейская колония существовала в Мцхете в эллинистический период по крайней мере с 169 г. до н. э.

После многовековых отношений с персами, арабами и турками, представители этих народов стали приезжать и селиться в Грузии. Курды и туркмены поселились в Грузии в период позднего средневековья. Курдские племена появились в южной части Грузии, Месхетии, с XVI века. Они были в основном мусульманами. Часть курдского народа, а именно езиды, были приняты правительством Грузии в 1918 году, во время Первой мировой войны (1914-1918) из-за того, что они подвергались преследованиям со стороны турок и части курдов-мусульман по религиозным и политическим мотивам. С начала XVII века туркменские племена (Борчалу, Хасанлу, Насибу, Байдари, Демурчи-Хасанлу) поселились в Квемо Картли и Кахети. Позже они начали постепенно интегрироваться в грузинскую феодальную систему и с тех пор активно участвовали в жизни грузинского государства.

Этнические группы, обосновавшиеся в Грузии, сохранили свои языки, обычаи, традиции и культуру. Грузия стала для них местом назначения, потому что они прекрасно понимали, что в этой стране их не лишат идентичности. Наряду с грузинскими православными церквями в Грузии были синагоги, армянские церкви, мечети и даже огнепоклоннический храм — Атешгах.

В X-XIV веках Грузия оказывала значительное политическое и культурное влияние на народы Северного Кавказа, такие как народы Малой Абхазии (абаза-адыгейцы), касоги (черкесы), аланы-осетины, дурдзуки (вайнахи), хунзахцы и лезгины (аварцы и другие народы, проживающие в Дагестане). Эти народы попали в сферу влияния Грузии. Грузинское государство стремилось тесно связать эти народы с Грузией, знакомя их и распространяя среди них грузинский язык, христианство и грузинскую культуру. После опустошительных нашествий монголо-татар и Тамерлана в XIII-XIV веках этнополитическая ситуация в Предкавказье резко изменилась. Коренное население было вынуждено уступить завоевателям равнины Предкавказья и бежать в недоступные для врагов и в то же время труднопроходимые горы. «Население Предкавказья, страдающая от скудости ресурсов в неудобных горах, пыталась

занять и обосноваться на грузинских землях у подножия Большого Кавказа. Набеги монголов и Тамерлана имели катастрофические последствия для Грузии: страна понесла огромные потери, города и села были опустошены, обострились внутренние феодальные конфликты. Во второй половине XV века Грузинское царство распалось на царства Картли, Кахети, Имеретинское и княжество Самцхе. В XV-XVI веках Грузия оказалась граничащей с крайне агрессивными мусульманскими государствами: с юго-запада — с Османской империей, с юго-востока — с Сефевидским Ираном. Эти державы боролись за господство на Ближнем Востоке, за завоевание и подчинение Грузии. Грузия стала полем постоянной борьбы. В этот период произошло переселение в Грузию кавказских горцев — вайнахов и дагестанцев.

Переселение вайнахов в Грузию относится к глубокой древности. Согласно «Грузинским летописям», второй царь Картли Савромак привел дурдзуков и поселил их в стране. После монгольских нашествий в XIII веке вайнахи отступили в горы и смешались с грузинскими горцами. Грузинские горцы — мохевы, мтиулы, пшавы, туши и хевсуры — называли своих соседей чеченцев и ингушей кистами, а их страну — Кистети. В XVIII-XIX вв. в Грузии поселилось вайнахское племя кистов. Кистинцы, проживающие в Грузии, считают себя чеченцами, хотя они родом из горного района современной Ингушетии, из долины реки Армхи (Кистетисцкали). Кистинцы, проживающие в Грузии, сохранили свои обычаи, язык и религию. В позднем средневековье, начиная с XVII века, в Грузию стали заселяться дагестанцы.

Традиционное грузинское название дагестанцев — лекцы [лезгины]. В грузинской исторической литературе горный Дагестан, или Авария, упоминается как Хундзети/Гундзети, а его жители, аварцы, известны как Хундзисы/Гунзисы. Начиная с XVI века Дагестан, находившийся под грузинским влиянием и подчинением, начал совершать нападения на Грузию. До конца XVI века Кахетинскому царству удавалось эффективно отражать их. В этих условиях дагестанцы поселились в восточной части Кахети, исторической Эрети, при условии службы царям Кахети в качестве крепостных. Царь Кахети Леван (1520-1574) «привел лезгин и поселил их в Пипинети».

После того, как лезгины поселились там, Пипинети стал известен как Чари. Устав от экономических трудностей, дагестанские лезгины приходили в Кахетию, селились там и начинали служить некоторым дворянам в качестве крепостных. Между тем, эпизодические нападения дагестанцев, начавшиеся в XVI веке, усилились в XVII веке. Этот процесс известен как Лекианоба. Это были мелкомасштабные нападения дагестанцев на Грузию, направленные на разграбление имущества, скота, урожая и взятие людей в плен, а позднее на завоевание поселений и взимание дани с покоренного населения. После походов персидского шаха Аббаса I в Грузию в начале XVII века лезгины начали селиться на безлюдных землях восточной Кахетии. Постепенно местное грузинское население приняло ислам и ассимилировалось с лезгинами, в то время как другие были проданы лезгинами в качестве пленников. В XVIII веке аварские и цахурские лезгины образовали в Восточной Кахетии так называемые «свободные общины» Чари, Белакани, Тали, Катехи, Мацехи, Мухахи, Мамрухи и Гогами.

Примечательно, что грузинская феодальная историография рассматривала набеги дагестанцев как форму внутренней распри. Согласно грузинской национальной концепции, лезгины также считались грузинами, хотя и отклонившимися от грузинских обычаев. Вот почему царь Кахети Александр II (1574-1605) сетовал на отчуждение «крепостных, служивших им тысячу лет». Вторжения лезгин объяснялись культурными различиями и нарушением экономических связей. По словам князя Вахушти, все кавказцы считались «грузинами». В средние века термин «грузин» или «грузин по роду» относился как к этническим грузинам, так и к культурным грузинам. Культурная грузинская идентичность не подразумевала нивелирования языка, этнической принадлежности, религии, обычаев и традиций; напротив, защита и сохранение этих культурных ценностей гарантировались в рамках грузинского государства. Именно рассмотрение этих вопросов ставит задачей представленная