

The Abazinians

R. Abaza

Caucasian Review, Institute for the Study of the USSR
No.8, Munich, 1959, pp.34-40

The Abazinians are aborigines of the Caucasus.[1] In the course of the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries, the forefathers of the contemporary Abazinians migrated to the Northern Caucasus from the Black Sea region, roughly from the area between the Tuapse and the Bzyb rivers.[2] Although a considerable part of the Abazinians migrated, some of them still continued to remain in the Black Sea region until 1864.[3]

Up to the 1860's, the Abazinians numbered approximately 60,000. At the present time, there are only about 20,000 in the Northern Caucasus living in villages in the Karachai-Circassian Autonomous Oblast, in two villages in the vicinity of Kislovodsk, in a number of settlements in the Kabardino-Balkar ASSR, such as Malka, and also scattered throughout the eastern part of the Adyghei Autonomous Oblast (in Ulskoe, Koshekhabl, and other locations).[4]

The reduction in the number of Abazinians is explained as due to three basic reasons: 1) the amalgamation of the Abazinians or the Adyghe-Kabardinians (Circassians); 2) the decimation of large numbers of Abazinians, together with other Circassians, during the Russo-Caucasian wars; and 3) the mass emigration to Turkey of almost 30,000 Abazinians between 1858-64.[5]

The migration of the Abazinians to the North Caucasian foothills preceded the exit of the Kabardinians to the east of the Kuban basin. Some researchers (such as P. Butkov, N. Debu, Sh. Nogmov, L. Lopatinsky, and the Soviet researcher, L. Lavrov),[6] have attempted to explain this as resulting from armed action of the Abazinians against the Kabardinians, while other authors (such as K. Glavani, S. Bronevsky, L. Lyulye, and A. Berzhe)[7] take the view that this occurred as a result of an agreement between the Abazinians and the Kabardinians. We accept the latter version since the Kabardinians at that time were the most powerful and numerous group which had themselves ousted the Ossetins and the Balkars from the lower territories to the mountains in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. This migration had been especially welcomed by Inal the Great, who had taken as his goal the unification of all the Circassians. In addition to this, Inal the Great was related to the most influential Abazinian prince, Ash, to whose daughter he was married.[8] Thus, Inal had apparently succeeded in concluding an agreement with Prince Ash, whereby the latter was permitted to move all the Abazinians into Circassia to join those who had previously fled there. This played an important role in the unification of the Circassians and Inal placed great hopes on the Abazinians in this struggle.[9]

The struggle of the Circassians, together with the other people of the Northern Caucasus, against the Tsarist government for their freedom and independence is well known. It continued for more than one hundred years during which time the Abazinians took an active part.[10]

The Abazinians were divided into two principal groups: the Tapanta and Shkarauau. The Tapanta were known among the Circassians as *Baskhyags*, while the Nogais called them *Altykesek Abaza* (Six-Lobe Abazinians) because of the ancient division of the Tapantas into six groups. U. K. Glavani (1724) called them *Beshkesek Abaza* (Five-Lobe Abazinians), since in the beginning of the eighteenth century they apparently consisted of only five groups. However, since the nineteenth century all documents have referred to them as *Altykesek Abaza*. The various groups of the Tapantas were named according to the family names the ruling princes: Loos, *Biberds*, *Dudarukos*, *Klyches*, *Kyaches*, and *Dzhantemirs*.

In the middle of the eighteenth century, the *Loos* lived with the other Tapantas along both banks of the Kuban River and in the region of the Kuban, Kuma, and Malka rivers. The numerous and powerful family of the prince of *Loos* (Seral-Ipa, Ali-Murza, Devlet-Girei, Mamat-Girei, and Ismail and Kazi Loos), claimed to be descended from the Arabian emirs,[11] but N. Kamenev tells of a German Baron Loo, who had been aide-de-camp to a Prussian prince and had traveled to the Caucasus with this prince in 1863 where he had been the guest of an Abazinian prince, Colonel Mamat-Girei Loo. The German baron claimed that his family chronicles told of a Colonel Loo who had participated in the Crusades, from which he did not return. During his visit, Baron Loo saw his family coat-of-arms on a ring which Mamat-Girei was wearing[12] and from these facts concluded that the *Loos* in the Caucasus were descended from the Germans. It is much more likely that the German family of Loo came originally from the Caucasus since there is no doubt that the Loo family had its origin in the Caucasus and derived its name from the Loo River which runs into the Black Sea region northwest of Sochi, from where the Abazinians migrated to the Northern Caucasus.[13] Thus, the German origin of the *Loos* is as unlikely as the legend of their Arab origin.

The *Loos* ruled the Tapantas with the help of their *amystada*[14] (retinue), the Komards, Lies, Dzhidzhes, Dzhugotans, Sheremets Lafishes, and Trams. During the Russo-Caucasian wars from 1774-1860, the *Loos* were forced to migrate from one place to the other each year. For instance, in 1774 they lived in the northern mountains of Beshtau and along the Teberda River, in 1786 along the upper Kuban, in 1787 along the upper Kuma, in 1789 along the Kuban, in 1790 along the Kuma and the Takhtamysh or Tamlyk rivers, during 1793-94 along the upper Kuma and the Kardanika, Teberda, and Shona rivers, in 1804 on the other side of the Kuban, in 1811 again along the Kuma, and in 1823 in the vicinity of the stanitsa Essentukskaya. During the 1860's a large number of *Loos* migrated to Turkey, while the remainder formed the present settlements of Indzhikchkun, Kubina, Krasno-Vostochnoe, and Koidan.

The *Biberds* were ruled by Prince Biberds and his *amystada*, the Maqars and Dzhantemirs. In the middle of the seventeenth century they dwelled along the Maly Zelenchuk River and the Kuban, and although they roamed along the Teberda in 1787, as well as the upper Kuma and Marukh rivers, they fled across the Kuban in 1804 and again returned to the Kuma in 1805. There is no information in the documents about the times and circumstances of the later migrations of the *Biberds*. It is only known that in 1833 they still numbered "among the unsubdued mountaineers of the Kuban region." And in 1866 still resided in the same place where their descendants, the Eburgans, now live.

The *Dudarukos* were ruled by the Daruko princes, whom the Circassians called *Dudaruko*. This family also claimed descent from the Arab emirs. We note, however, that this family name, without the Circassian ending "ko," which means "son," was prevalent among the Ossetins who did not consider themselves Arabs. In 1746 the *Dudarukos* lived in the region of

the Laba, Urub, and Kuban rivers and in the vicinity of Tyumegi, in 1787 along the Maly Zelenchuk River, in 1804 along the Kuban, in 1805 along the Kuma and on the other side of the Kuban, and later again along the Maly Zelenchuk until 1824. The majority, however, were destroyed by Russian expeditionary forces, while the remainder returned to the present settlement of Psyzh in 1834.

The *Klyches* were ruled by Prince Klych and were known in 1724 as the *Kimlyaks* or *Kimyalks*. More specific mention of them commences in the early 1780's when they lived along the Maly Zelenchuk River, later in 1787 along the Kuma, in 1790 along the Kalmurza River, in 1794 again along the Kuma, in 1804 on the other side of the Kuban, in 1805 again along the Kuma, and from 1812-14 along the Bolshoi Zelenchuk River. They lived here until 1834, whence they migrated to the Kuban. In 1865 there was a settlement named Klychevskoe in this area which is known today as Psauchya-Dakhe.

Prince Kyach was the ruler of the *Kyaches*, who originally lived in the area where the settlements of Kurgokinskoe and Karamurzinskoe are now located. In 1787 they lived along the upper Maly Zelenchuk and later migrated to the right bank of the Kuban, in 1804 they fled to the other side of the Kuban, in 1831 in the upper basin of the Maly Zelenchuk, in 1860 along the right bank of the Mari, and later in the settlement of Egibekovskoe, now called Abazakt.

The *Dzhantemirs* were ruled by the Dzhantemir princes. In 1794 they lived near the present site of Pyatigorsk, but prior to this, they were found in the basin of the upper Kuma River. In 1800 Lieutenant General Knorring stated in his report to Paul I that, in the vicinity of the health resorts near Konstantinogorsk "where there are warm mineral waters, live the Dzhantemirs of Abazinians, a well-behaved and obedient people." However, in 1804 the *Dzhantemirs* fled from the Russians to the other side of the Kuban and only after several years returned to the former location.[15] In 1823 S. Bronevsky reported that "the Dzhantemir villages were scattered along the Kuma and Podkumka rivers with small farmsteads extending as far as the fortress of Kislovodskaya itself, numbering approximately 500 households." [16] They remained there until the late 1860's and apparently later mingled with the Kabardinians who lived in Bolshaya [Great] Kabarda.[17]

Information on the *Abukos*, *Tambukos*, and *Makhokos* is very scanty. The *Abukos*, headed by the Abuko family, were located near the junction of the Eshkakon and Kuma rivers in 1852, when the inhabitants of this region were expelled to various Kabardian settlements with whom they mingled. The settlement of the *Tambukos*, ruled by the Tambuko family, has been known since 1809, when it was located on the left bank of the Kuban River. The second and last mention of them is encountered in 1820, when they were located on the other side of the Kuban. The settlement of the *Makhokos* was also known to be located on the other side of the Kuban in 1820.

The settlement of Babukovskoe was known to be located on the Malka River as early as 1774. In 1821 General Ermolov decided to organize a permanent detachment of the hundred sabers from Babukovskoe which was to be headed by the commander of a Volga Cossack regiment. In August 1822, by order of Alexander I, this detachment was formed into a Cossack *Sotnya* (hundred) in the same regiment and the inhabitants of the settlement were designated as Cossacks. In 1861, after a series of protests and armed uprisings they lost their status as Cossacks and were exiled to other Abazinian and Kabardinian settlements.[18]

The second major division of the Abazinians, the Shkarauau group, comprised the *Mysylbais*, *Tams*, *Kizilbeks*, *Chegrei*, and *Barakais*. The *Mysylbais* were also known as the *Mysylbarypsh*, *Bashilbais*, *Basylbai*, or *Psylbai*. First mention of them comes from Evliya-Çelebi in 1641 and 1676, when they lived in the Northern Caucasus and could, according to their own words, muster 7,500 brave warriors.[19] In 1758 they were living along the upper Urup. In 1769 the Tsarist government considered resettling them in Kabardia along the Cherek, but this plan was canceled due to the strong objections of the *Mysylbais* themselves. In 1791 they were still living along the upper Urup in an area which Pallas determined as located in the region of the upper Urup, the Kefar, and Tsikh (?) rivers and partly along the Bolshaya and Malaya Tegeni rivers. In 1837 the Russians settled them on the plains and they were forced to leave their mountain home. At this time, one of their settlements, which belonged to Mamat-Grei Sidov, was known to be located along the upper Urup. The *Mysylbais* remained on the plains only a short while, and again in 1842 returned to their former location. In 1850 the settlement of Sidov, which had been located about seven versts south of Nadezhdinsky fortress, together with other *Mysylbais*, left the upper Urup and settled on the right side of Bolshoi Zelenchuk, but in 1851 they lived in the region of the Fars and Psefir rivers. In the following year they were known to be living in the settlements of Kyusan-Kamarduv, Tokam-Blyanau, and Egibokovskoe; the latter two soon migrated closer to the Kuban. The present settlement of Abazakt (formerly Egibokovskoe) apparently dates from this period.

During the Russo-Caucasian wars, in the middle of the nineteenth century, the greater part of the *Mysylbais* were moved to the west so that in 1858 they lived in the region of the upper Bolshaya and Malaya Laba (below the present area of Akhmetovskaya and Andryukovskaya). During this period, they comprised, according to some sources, six, and according to others, four settlements: Sidov, Khudakirov, Islamov on the left bank of the Bolshaya Laba and Zhetkerob on the right bank of the Malaya Laba. In 1861 they migrated to Turkey rather than submit to Russian domination, but a small group remained on Russian soil and today these people live in Abazakt, Indzhikchkun, Psauchya-Dakhe, Kuvinskoe, Elburgan, and in two villages in the Adyghei Autonomous Oblast, Ulskoe and Koshekhabl.

The *Tams* were first mentioned in the beginning of the 1780's when they were ruled by the Zaurum princes and their *amystada*, Kudzhes. The origin of the word "Tam" is unknown. It has been suggested that it comes from the family name of a well-known prince, Tambi-Kabarda, but among the Mdave (Dzhiks), who lived in the Black Sea region, the word "Tambii" means "Prince of the Tams." The *Tams* lived on the upper Bolshaya Laba until 1837 when moved to several other locations further south along this same river. In 1842 they again moved to the upper Bolshaya Laba, above the present site of Akhmetovskaya. In 1861 they moved beyond the main Caucasus range to Mdave and thence to Turkey. A small number of them, together with the *Kizilbeks*, from the present village of Kuvinskoe.

The *Kizilbeks* received their name from the princely family of Kizilbek who, according to tradition, were descended from the son of a Crimean khan, Kizilbek by name, who had fled to the Caucasus. Among the retinue of this ruler were the Gergovs, Papnovs, Kanimatovs, Adzhibeevs, and Margushevs. First mention of the *Kizilbeks* dates back to 1742 when their settlements were scattered along the Andryuk, a branch of the Malaya Laba. According to some information, in 1858 there were five or six separate settlements, the Sagat-Girei, Sultan Akancha, Dokshei Dokshoko, Saral-ipa Kizilbek, and Samalkha. In 1830 the *Kizilbek* settlement of "Kumnilalo," apparently Kanimatov, was located over fifty versts from Kaladzhei. In 1861 the majority of the *Kizilbeks* migrated to Turkey, while the remainder,

together with the *Tams*, lived in the Caucasus in the village of Staro-Kuvinskoe and were scattered throughout other Abazinian and Circassian settlements, such as Ulskoe, Apsua, Khabez, Indzhukchkun, Psauchya-Dakhe, Khodz, and others.

The *Chegreis* are better known in literature as *Shakhgireis*. They were ruled by the family of Tsikises and the *amystada*, the Kubats, Shators, and Kelmurzies. The *Chegreis* were first mentioned in the middle of the eighteenth century when they lived in the valley of the Malaya Laba below the region of Andryukovskaya. In 1834, after taking the oath of “Russian citizenship,” the *Chegreis* moved to the plains somewhere along the lower Malaya Laba, but soon repudiated their citizenship and moved back to the mountains. In 1851 they were again compelled to take the oath and to move to the plains, but once more in 1858 they retired to the mountains to their former abode. At this time, according to Colonel Lisanevich, they comprised three settlements, but more accurate information states that there were four: Mukhammed Kubat, Effendi Shator, Kelmurzie, and Tsikis, or Tsekshne, which were scattered along both banks of the upper Malaya Laba River. However, the banks of this river were apparently not the only dwelling places of these people, as information in 1859 indicated that there was a large settlement on the Khodz River. In 1861 the *Chegreis* abandoned their settlements and spent the winter of 1861-62 in the region of the main Caucasus range, and in the spring of 1862 in the overwhelming majority of them migrated to Turkey. A small number of the *Chegreis* submitted to the Russians and moved to the left bank of the Khodz River, whence they later moved to their present location in the village of Apsua (formerly Chegrei or Shakhgireevskoe). According to these inhabitants, prior to settling in this area, they had lived at various times in the basin of the Khodz River in the vicinity of Nakhviikh. A few of the *Chegreis* settled in the towns of Staro-Kuvinskoe, Ulskoe, and Khodz.

The *Bags* in the Northern Caucasus have been known since the beginning of the eighteenth century. They were ruled by the Bagoshes family and their *amystada*, the Shchukos, Tanashes, and Shamshes. Until 1862 they lived along the upper Khodz River in one or two settlements, of which Bagushe was located on the left bank of the river. In 1863 they all migrated to Turkey.

The *Barakais* were ruled by the Lyakhos princes and their *amystada*, the Ganshoks, Kuganchukos, and Anchokos. In the beginning of the eighteenth century they lived along the Gubs River until the 1730's when they moved to the plains. In 1841 they again returned to their former bode where they remained until 1862 in the settlement of Baraka Dakhov along the upper course of the Gubs. In the same year, they moved their dwellings west to the Dakhovskoe ravine and from there they moved to Turkey in 1863.[20]

The examples chosen in this article are illustrative of how the “tribes” and “languages” of the peoples of the Northern Caucasus were created. These depended on the dwelling places of the people, the names of their princes, and so forth. In essence, they are all one people, with a common history of resistance to oppressors and endless migrations to escape domination by stronger foes. The one Western Caucasian ethnic, linguistic group; they are capable of living together with a common language and with common interest, in spite of the “myths” of so many so-called experts on the Caucasus, who claim that there are scores of races and languages in this area. The purpose of this article has been show the origin of these so-called “scores of races and languages.”

Notes

[1] L. I. Lavrov, “Abaziny. Istoriko-etnografichesky ocherk” (An Historical and Ethnographic Outline of the Abazinians), *Kavkazsky etnografichesky sbornik*, No. 1, Moscow, 1955, pp. 6, 8-9; *Polnoe sobranie russkikh letopisei* (A Complete Collection of the Russian Chronicles), Vols. I-XXV, Moscow-Leningrad, 1841-1949. (See the years, 1154, 1223, 1346, and 1395.)

[2] L. I. Lavrov, *op. cit.*, pp. 5, 27, 29.

[3] *Ibid.*

[4] *Ibid.*

[5] *Ibid.*

[6] P. G. Butkov, *Materialy dlya novoi istorii Kavkaza s 1720 po 1803 god* (Materials for a New History of the Caucasus from 1720 through 1803), Vol. I. Parts 1-3, St Petersburg, 1869; N. F. Grabovsky, “Prisoedinenie k Rossii Kabardy i ee borba za ne-zavisimost” (The Annexation of Kabarda by Russia and Its Struggle for Independence), *Sbornik svedenii o Kavkazskikh gortsakh*, 9th ed., Tiflis, 1876; I. Debu, *O Kavkazskoi linii i prisoedinenom k nei Chernomorskom voiske, ili voobshche zamechaniya o poselennykh polkakh, ograzhdayushchikh Kavkazskuyu liniyu i o sosedstvennykh gorskikh narodakh* (The Caucasian Line and the Black Sea Forces Assigned to It, or General Remarks about the Regiments of Settlers which are Guarding the Caucasian Line and the Neighbouring Mountain Peoples), St Petersburg, 1829; Sh. Nogmov, “Istoriya Adykhetskogo naroda, sostavlenaya po predaniyam kabardintsev” (The History of the Adyghei People, Compiled from Legends of the Kabardians), *Kavkazsky calendar*, Tiflis, 1861; L. G. Lopatinsky, “Zametka o narode adyge voobshche i kabardintsakh v chastnosti” (A Note Concerning the Adyghei People in General and the Kabardinians in Particular), *Sbornik materialov dlya opisaniya mestnosteni i plemen Kavkaza*, 12th ed., Tiflis, 1891. Quoted by L. I. Lavrov, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

[7] K. Glavani, “Opisanie Cherkesii 1724 g.” (A Description of the Circassians in 1724), “Sbornik materialov dlya opisaniya mestnosteni i plemen Kavkaza”, 17th ed., Tiflis, 1893; S. Bronevsky, *Noveishie geograficheskie i istoricheskie izvestiya o Kavkaze* (The Latest Geographical and Historical Information about the Caucasus), Part 1, Moscow, 1823; L. Lyulye, *Cherkesiya. Istoriko-etnograficheskie stati* (Historical and Ethnographic Expulsion of the Mountaineers from the Caucasus), *Russkaya starina*, No. 1, 2, and 10, St. Petersburg, 1882. Quoted by L. I. Lavrov, *op. cit.*, pp. 9-10.

[8] L. I. Lavrov, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

[9] R. Traho, *Cherkesy* (The Circassians) Munich, 1956, p. 17.

[10] *Ibid.*, pp. 19-105.

[11] K. Glavani, *op. cit.*, p. 155. Quoted by L. I. Lavrov, *op. cit.*, pp. 23-26.

[12] N. Kamenev. “Razvaliny tserkvi Sv. Georgiya, otkrytoi na reke Beloi” (The Divisions in the Church of St. George Discovered on the Belaya River), *Pamyatnaya knizhka Kubanskoj oblasti na 1877 god*, Ekaterinodar, 1877. Quoted by L. I. Lavrov, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

[13] L. I. Lavrov, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

[14] *Amysta* or *Amystada*, meaning “Free Peasant.” The *Amystada* formed the retinue and bodyguard of the prince. They were the head men of the separate settlements where there were no princes.

[15] L. I. Lavrov, *op. cit.*, pp. 23-31.

[16] S. Bronevsky, *op. cit.*, p. 333.

[17] L. I. Lavrov, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

[18] *Ibid.*

[19] Evliy Çelebi, *Seyahat Naması* (A Traveler's Impressions), Istanbul, 1928, pp. 707-764, 806.

[20] L. I. Lavrov, *op. cit.*, pp. 23-31.



Circassian World is an independent non-profit web site dedicated to create an informational resource for Circassians and non-Circassians who wish to learn more about the heritage, culture, and history of the Adyghe-Abkhaz people. For more information regarding CW, please contact: info@circassianworld.com

Circassian World
www.circassianworld.com