

LOCAL PERSPECTIVES AND THE PROTECTION OF NATURAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES IN RURAL
DEVELOPMENT IN THE HISTORICAL-ETHNOGRAPHIC KHEVSHURETI REGION OF THE GREATER CAUCASUS
RANGE

A Project Paper

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School

of Cornell University

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Professional Studies in Agriculture and Life Sciences

Field of International Agriculture and Rural Development

by

Ryan Michael Sherman

December 2018

© 2018 Ryan Michael Sherman

ABSTRACT

Mountainous communities in Georgia face high unemployment, lack of social services, lack of infrastructure, and threats from natural disasters. This has led to high rates of outmigration. While recent tourism trends have given rise to a nascent tourism industry in Khevsureti that is helping to revitalize the area, lack of protective status, quality of information, and management plans risk degradation of cultural heritage, and natural and cultural sites. The Georgian government and World Bank have identified promoting the resilience of mountainous communities as a top priority. The government has made commitments to improve the quality of life in remote mountain communities through local business development, infrastructure upgrades, and by providing people with economic assistance, yet the sudden onset of international tourism in Khevsureti creates a myriad of pressing and complicated challenges. Without proper tourism management, popular sites such as the fortress-villages Mutso and Shatili risk irreversible degradation due to much traffic and misuse. Unstable structures have been known to collapse and present a serious safety hazards to visitors. Failure to carry out much-needed restorations of sites comprises their integrity. A narrow focus on tourism development by the Georgian government and development projects neglects the economic and agricultural needs of Khevsureti, increasing likelihood of outmigration.

The Caucasus have been much written about and romanticized throughout history, but it was not until the rise of cultural heritage tourism that this became an interactive relationship in which misrepresentation penetrates the local experience and influences economic incentives. Proper tourism management will include active efforts to provide accurate information about cultural heritage and correct misrepresentation. Not only is irreversible loss of cultural heritage a risk, but this will undermine the sustainability of the tourism industry itself on which Khevsureti locals increasingly rely on for livelihoods. While current development plans and reports such as the World Bank and Municipal

Development Fund of Georgia's *The Strategic Environmental, Social and Cultural Heritage Assessment* (SESHSA) constantly tout the benefits for locals, these plans focus exclusively on tourism potentials and do not consider other important local livelihoods or the preferences of the local people.

This study represents a multidisciplinary approach to an examination of the protection of cultural and natural resources of Khevsureti, including qualitative methods, analysis of policy and developments, and in-depth study of relevant history and literature. Chapter 1 captures what Khevsurs themselves experience as their greatest challenges and what they wish for the future of their ancestral home, based on a series of in-depth interviews conducted in the summer of 2017. Chapter 2 analyzes discusses the benefits and risks of current development projects in Khevsureti and informs the issues raised with local perspectives. Chapter 3 discusses how the Caucasus have had a long history misrepresentation in both popular culture and academic literature. Chapter 4 deconstructs the widespread story that Khevsurs are the descendants of a band of medieval Crusaders.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Ryan Sherman was born and grew up in Ogden, Utah. He graduated from Weber State University in 2007 with a Bachelor of Science in Philosophy. From 2012 to 2014 he served in the Peace Corps in the village of Kistauri in the Kakheti Region of The Republic of Georgia. He welcomes emails at RMS449@cornell.edu.

To my nephews, Silas Arthur Street and Lucas George Sherman, who came into the world while this project was underway. May your stories be as beautiful as each of you.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you first to those who went with me to Khevsureti to interview, film, record, and understand our experiences, and were willing to walk long distances: Tatia Kalatozishvili, Maia Tserediani, Levan Aleqsidze, and my brother Jason Sherman.

Thank you to my advisor Terry Tucker for patiently seeing me through a project that I kept expanding and insisting be more complicated than needed. Thank you to James Lassoie as Director of Global Development Program and Terry for generously funding my travels to Georgia to conduct the qualitative research in the summer of 2017.

Thank you to Denise Percey, for immense help with administrative, technical, financial, and organizational issues and details.

Thank you to my dear friend Artur Gorokh who, honest-to-god, translated for me from old Russian the entire Arnold Zisserman article from the 1951 *Kavkaz* newspaper.

Thank you to Maia Tserediani and her father David Tserediani for their helpful insights at many points during my writing and much assistance with the source material.

And finally, for the helpful suggestions and edits of earlier drafts, thank you very much to Terry Tucker, Michael Sherman, Paul Manning, and Alexander Bainbridge.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	i
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH.....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	v
Chapter 1: Khevsureti in the Voices of Khevsurs	1
1.1 Character Profile: Gaga of Barisakho	2
1.2 Methodology.....	5
1.3 Main Findings	6
1.3 A Changed Khevsureti	7
1.3.1 Outmigration.....	7
1.3.2 Soviet Resettlement.....	9
1.3.3 The Loss of Old Ways and a New Cultural Identity:.....	11
1.3.4 Repopulation?.....	13
1.4 Khevsureti Today.....	15
1.4.1 Property Rights	15
1.4.2 Do Schools Contribute to Outmigration and Compromise Culture?	16
1.4.3 Frustration with Government.....	17
1.4.4 Need for Medical Services	18
1.4.5 Livelihoods and the Challenges of Winter	19
1.5.1 Syncretism.....	22
1.5.2 Orthodoxy Versus Tradition.....	25
1.5.3 Khati or Khevsur Shrines	26
1.5.4 Religious offices	31
1.5.5 Khevsur Holy Days and Celebrations	32
1.5.6 Holy Beer.....	33
1.5.7 Devs.....	33
1.5.8 Existential Threats.....	34
1.6 Tourism in Khevsureti	35
1.6.1 Local Experience of Growing Tourism	35
1.6.2 Shatili	37
1.7 Conclusion: Development and Return.....	38
Chapter 2: Development Policy and Projects in Khevsureti	41
2.1 Need for Viable Livelihoods	45
2.2 Current Developments.....	45
2.2.1 The Law on the Development of Mountainous Regions	45
2.2.2 Building Roads in Khevsureti	46
2.2.3 Arkhoti Valley Road.....	47

2.2.4 "Sno-Juta-Roshka-Shatili-Omalo-Khadori Valley-Batsara-Akhmeta Road Construction Project"	48
2.3 Agricultural development	49
2.4 New Tourism in Khevsureti.....	50
2.4.1 Protection of Cultural Resources	52
2.4.2 The Case of Shatili.....	54
2.4.3 Shatili's Disconcerting Association with UNESCO.....	55
2.4.4 The Case of Mutso	58
2.4.5 The Case of Amgha	59
2.5 Conclusion	62
Chapter 3: The Caucasus as Seen by Outsiders in History, Anthropology, Linguistics, Literature, Popular Culture and Scholarship.....	64
3.1 Caucasian Origin Stories in Early Anthropology, Linguistics, and Greek Mythology	66
3.2 Popular Depictions of the Caucasus in Modern Western Culture	72
3.3 Edward Said Would Likely Resist Applications of <i>Orientalism</i> to the Caucasus	75
3.4 Was Pushkin's <i>Prisoner of the Caucasus</i> Subversive or Imperial?	77
3.5 Are the Caucasus Russia's Orient?	82
3.6 Conclusion	88
Chapter 4: Kicking the Crusaders out of Khevsureti	91
4.1 The Holy Crusader Meme in Popular Sources Today.....	92
4.2 Historical Overview of the Khevsur-Crusader Meme	94
4.3 Academic Criticism of the Crusader Meme from Historic Sources.....	97
4.4 A Systematic Repudiation of the Crusader Origin Story	98
4.4.1 Dismantling the Khevsureti cocoon	99
4.4.2 The Original Crusader Origin Story	102
4.4.3 Zisserman's Own Uncertainty.....	105
4.4.4 The Khevsurs' Medieval Weapons.....	107
4.4.5 Geographer N. A. Busch: The Only Other Scholarly Treatment	108
4.5 Khevsurs' Traditional Origin Story is Meaningful and Plausible	110
4.6 Conclusion: How the Khevsur-Crusader Meme Spreads	112
BIBLIOGRAPHY	115

Chapter 1: Khevsureti in the Voices of Khevsurs

“We are still going because of momentum, but it is slowing down—how long can it keep going?”
 — Gaga of Barisakho, June 10th, 2017, Barisakho Village

To spend an afternoon with a family who opens up to you, tells you of their history, their hopes, and their personal tragedies and struggles, changes forever how one thinks about a particular people in the context of a place. These people are what many a study or project will simply refer to as beneficiaries and target groups. They are often defined in terms of easily measured and indexed indicators that have often been developed without consulting or understanding local people.

Ethnography and qualitative approaches themselves are sometimes felt to be an answer to a dehumanization of quantitative study or an organization’s policy, yet often these methods often only amplify the most unusual aspects of a people, without considering the actual constraints on their lives and day-to-day challenges. In the case of Khevsureti, cultural studies have focused almost exclusively on traditions of blood feuds, interesting linguistic features, a unique style of martial art, the socially-sanctioned intimate love behaviors of the youth,¹ and the Khevsur habit of donning swords and chainmail.

This chapter wishes to avoid both these tendencies, and capture Khevsureti as it exists today in the voices of local people. Its objective is to discover what Khevsurs today experience in terms of loss of culture, livelihood challenges, and what they wish for the future of their ancestral home.

In the summer of 2017, our team conducted a series of interviews in villages throughout Khevsureti. The locals we spoke with told us of their hopes and losses, their daily struggles, their personal histories, their beliefs and traditions, their families and futures, and about the changes they saw in Khevsureti. We listened to the worries of concerned parents, recollections of grandparents, of

¹ Manning, Paul. Love Stories: *Language, Private Love, and Public Romance in Georgia*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015.

men and women who split their time working between the lowlands and the mountains, the religious visions of an elderly man, and confessions of indifference and apathy from the young. As we did so, Khevsureti went from being a research abstraction to a real place. Here, we were able to witness the enormous complexity of our subject, and understand we were seeing a Khevsureti that had changed drastically—one not yet captured in the literature on the area.

To begin, this paper will introduce its themes with a character profile based on an 87-minute conversation we had with one respondent. This profile was chosen as an introduction as it offers an excellent cross-section of Khevsureti life in the voice of one of the last Khevsurs. Methodology and results are then discussed followed by a detailed treatment of the emergent themes.

1.1 Character Profile: Gaga of Barisakho

Gaga was a well-read and well-spoken man who lived with his wife, daughter, and grandchildren high up on the mountainside overlooking Barisakho, the largest village and the administrative center of Khevsureti. Many years ago, Gaga was a border guard but was now retired and worked as the geography teacher at the local school. His family had suffered a devastating tragedy a few years before, when his son, grandchild, and daughter-in-law died in a car accident.

Gaga himself had always lived in Barisakho, except when a student at University in Tbilisi. He told us he prefers the quietness of the village. His house in Barisakho had been built 1964 on top of their family's original traditionally *bani* house, a flat roofed, two level terraced structure in the hillside. Ancient sections of the house were still under the *bani* roof, making Gaga's house one of the last (if not last) traditional dwellings in use, a detail he made sure to emphasize to us. In these old sections, he told us, his ancestors and their animals would lay side by side on the floor for most of the hard winter.

Tourists seemed to be coming to Khevsureti more and more often, Gaga said, although why now, he wasn't sure. When they came, they did not visit his Barisakho, which had very little to offer to tourists. His household therefore did not benefit from the increased traffic. Despite this, Gaga saw

tourism as only a good thing—*Khevsureti is becoming so empty. It is good if people know about it and come, and it helps people here earn money.*

While we were speaking to Gaga, his daughter came out of the house and joined the conversation. Although Barisakho, being one of the lowest villages, was more accessible than most of Khevsureti, Gaga and his daughter agreed that the road was still the biggest problem. *The cars get damaged. It keeps tourists away. The locals dread it. People often comment that if there was a road, it would be great for tourism, for everything.*

His daughter told us she sometimes goes and sits up on the *bani* to enjoy the peace, to look out and see only nature and hear only birds. Fall is especially beautiful she said. *It's so beautiful—even though I grew up here, sometimes I cannot take my eyes off it.*

While Gaga grows some of his food, this is done almost exclusively for family consumption—cucumber, herbs, onion, and garlic are some of the products they produce. It is not a source of income. Only potatoes are grown for surplus, not so much to sell but to exchange for produce that does not grow in Khevsureti, such as grapes to make wine. Growing crops is not worth the effort in Khevsureti, he told us. The time and trouble it takes to farm in Khevsureti is immense, plus the extra costs required to transport anything to market. And the market always changes, he added, so how is one to know if it will be worthwhile at all?

Most employed people in Barisakho work for the border control, Gaga told us. The salaries and work are good, he said, and if there is a cut in employment, it is not the Khevsurs that are let go.

When asked about what he hoped for the future of Khevsureti, Gaga became pensive and sighed. *I think about this all the time*, he told us. For Gaga, telling people to stay in Khevsureti is not a solution to the loss of culture. *You can tell people 'stay, you must stay,' and okay, they stay, but what can they do?*

Gaga told us that, more than anything, the threat to Khevsureti culture is lack of ways for people to occupy themselves. This is a somewhat different take than the standard answer we heard—that the disappearance of culture was due to everyone leaving. But culture is not about staying, he explained to us. It is about living. Even if you gave everything to make it possible for everyone to stay, it wouldn't help. You will not have realization of *oneself* if there is nothing to do. *I may have a pessimistic view*, he added, *but I can't think of anything for people to do if they stay here.*

Gaga feels Khevsureti has fragmented. He was reminded of an anecdote about Switzerland. "I've heard," he said, "I've heard but I don't know if it's true, that in Switzerland, each village specializes in producing one component of a watch." These parts are then collected to be assembled. Each village supports itself by playing a special role in creating something larger than the sum of their parts. For Gaga, Khevsureti is the converse of this, in a state of dissolution.

What made the most sense to Gaga is for future development to support the ordinary folk who live there, so that they do not also leave. *To repopulate this area is the stated position of the government, and the justification for the assistance that is sent to Khevsureti.* However, as Gaga pointed out, when assistance is given, it tends to go to Shatili, and Mutso, the famous tourist sites. But this is not where Khevsurs mainly live.

Khevsureti has changed a lot, Gaga told us. Now 80% of the villages are in ruins, and between both upper and lower Khevsureti², only 200 people are left, according to him. While the rest of Khevsureti suffers from poor roads, unusable much of the year, Gaga told us that roads to Barisakho are clear and maintained—never blocked for more than two days. Unlike many other parts of Khevsureti,

² Both by locals and in historical writings, Khevsureti is described as having two distinct regions, Pirikita Khevsureti and Piraketa Khevsureti (upper and lower), separated by Datvisjvari pass. In Lower Khevsureti is Gudani Village, traditionally believed to be Khevsureti's first village and where Khevsurs' most important holy shrines are found. In Upper Khevsureti is Shatili, Khevsureti's famous fortress village which stands at the Chechnyan border. Lower Khevsureti should be distinguished from "lowlands," which refers to non-mountainous areas.

most of the residents in Barisakho live there all year around. Upper Khevsureti, Gaga told us, is different. No families stay in Upper Khevsureti all winter.

Barisakho was part of the 1950 Soviet resettlements, Gaga explained. His people were moved to the lowland Kakheti region and given a vineyard and communal properties. His father was resettled in the village Markhilo, where one can still find a neighborhood of Khevsurs today. To discourage return, Gaga claimed, the Soviets planted non-native pine trees in their fields so as to turn the agricultural land into forest. While some of the resettled people did well in their new homes, others tried to return and had to struggle to live without community or culture.

Yet Soviet resettlements weren't the only culprit. "Even into the 60s I know we were cultivating plants: wheat, barley, we made our own bread locally, in 67, 68, we were still plowing and harvesting." Yet this more traditional way of life stopped *en masse*, he told us. No one needed to live this way anymore. Young people who had gone to Tbilisi and received an education were not interested in this way of life. Once you become used to a modern life style, it is difficult to come back to a place without gas, without reliable electricity, and no mobile reception in case of emergency.

Gaga used the concept of inertia and friction to explain Khevsureti. We are still going because of momentum, he said. But it is slowing down—how long can it keep going?

1.2 Methodology

Over two months, we were able to conduct 27 in-depth interviews involving 40 participants. We made an effort to reach those villages difficult to access, speaking with as diverse a sample as possible. To prepare for our interviews, we identified core themes and drafted several versions of interview scripts with open-ended questions.

Preselected themes included feelings about tourism, livelihood strategies, loss of culture and religious practices, and feelings about the past and future. During interviews, we allowed the

conversation to flow freely, following up with questions about emerging themes. We took copious notes, and many of these interviews were also recorded, transcribed, and then coded.

The coded themes emerging from the interviews fall into the following categories:

- Experience of Khevsureti development in recent years
- Meaning of Khevsur cultural heritage
- Perceived changes in Khevsureti
- Sense of loss of Khevsur way
- Sense of hope for the future
- Changes in cultural practices
- Khevsur culture as compared to Georgian culture
- The perceived effects of tourism
- Feelings about tourism sector development
- Soviet resettlements
- Livelihood strategies: traditional, emerging, and aspirational

During the course of the interviews, respondents sometimes became self-conscious when talking about Khevsur beliefs and religion, walking back things said earlier, or suddenly adopting a somewhat more skeptical attitude about certain aspects of Khevsur beliefs, such as the existence of *devs*, or the danger of the *Khatis*. At other times, we were aware of an expansive effect, as if the interviewee enjoyed exaggerating in order to wow guests. This, of course, is the limitation of such a short qualitative study, where interviewers are experienced primarily as curious outsiders. Finally, our project was made much easier by the simple fact that the people of Khevsureti are generally kind, open, straight forward, reflective, and happy to talk.

1.3 Main Findings

According to official census data, between 2002 and 2014, the Khevsureti population dropped from 866 to 354 people. Respondents attributed the high rate outmigration to lack of opportunity for

employment, and lack of interest in upland agriculture by young and middle-aged people. Interest in traditional festivals was reported as very high, with Khevsurs returning to their family villages to celebrate. Knowledge of the traditional religious practices was very low. Younger respondents indicated they did not know much about these things. Older respondents reported the traditional festivals now lacked the ceremony and religious observances that had once been performed by the Khevsur priests, the *Khevisberi*, and prophesies by the *Kadagi*. The sacrificing of animals and preparation of holy beer was still observed. Most respondents told us no true *Khevisberi* remained, and the *Khevisberi* we spoke with themselves reported they were not real *Khevisberi*, they did not know the prayers, and that they only performed this role because no one else could.

Livelihoods included agriculture, working for the border guard or school, and engagement in the tourism industry. Employment as a border guard was identified as the best job, and beef and dairy cattle represented the primary agricultural activity in Khevsureti. Registration of land was infrequent and difficult and property ownership was based on family and local knowledge. Education was identified by respondents with children as one of the main reasons to move to the lowlands. All respondents reported that every year, more tourists came to Khevsureti. While locals overwhelmingly considered this a positive development, as of yet tourism has provided new livelihood possibilities only in the few areas with cultural and natural attractions, namely the Abudelauri lakes and the fortress-villages of Shatili and Mutso.

1.3 A Changed Khevsureti

“The most difficult thing is to come out in the evening, and to see no light coming from anywhere, no smoke. To have no smoke from any chimney—it turns out that is the hardest thing of all.”
—Sandua Tsiklauri, 87 years old, July 13th, Amgha Village

1.3.1 Outmigration

When Sandua Tsiklauri was a child, 25 families lived in her village of Amgha in Arkhoti Valley. Yet when she was born, she told us, half the village was already in ruin. Her father-in-law Mitso had told her of a time when 45 families were living in Amgha. In the summer of 2017, when we visited, only one household remained. In the winter, no one but Sandua's son Paata stays so as to take care of the cows.

Khevsurs like Sandua, who can remember Khevsureti before it was forever changed by Soviet resettlements in the 1950s, are all in their 80s now. *Many things are forgotten and ways lost*, we were told time and again. The question "Is Khevsureti about to disappear completely?" hung over many of our interviews.

Throughout the 20th century, Khevsureti suffered high outmigration and Soviet policy-driven depopulation, but just as Sandua described, population decline began much earlier. A Russian Imperial census in 1873 records a Khevsureti population of 4,872 souls. A 2002 census showed 866 people living in the region, and a 2014 census recorded only 354 people.³ Locals judged it to be even less. *This year, we were the only ones that came back up, after the winter*, an elderly woman from Chie Village told us. Of the three houses still habitable, they lived in the smallest, the other two now empty. In 1886, her husband told us, Chie had 18 families, but by 1926, they were down to nine. In Barisakho, a man told us, 35 years ago, when he was a child at school, there were 360 kids. Now there are 64.

For many Khevsurs, Khevsureti has become a summer house destination, especially when children are out of school. Several families we met came only after the school term had ended. Much of Khevsureti is completely empty throughout the winter. Only a few lower villages, like the famous Gudani, and the administrative capital Barisakho, have families who stay year around.

In Akhieli village in Arkhoti Valley, a mother of three pointed out that as people leave, villages simply become even less able to support the population that remains. Schools are needed; therefore, a

³ "The General Description of the Population of 2014," Tbilisi: Geostat. 2015. Available at: <http://census.ge/files/results/english/>

teacher is needed. While older children can do well enough by themselves at the boarding school in Barisakho, to accommodate primary-age children, the whole family might need to move away.

Rural outmigration is not an opaque phenomenon in a world in which urban life offers many advantages, such as access to education, internet, hospitals, and employment. Plowing and harvesting crops and herding animals are no longer considered the most reliable way to have enough food. The young and middle-aged people we spoke with felt the poorly-compensated and backbreaking ways of traditional rural life were the ways of the past.

Many people who have left still have property in Khevsureti, but they do not return—no one wants to start farming with livestock. One man told us he had four brothers, all of whom live in the lowlands of Kakheti now and are never planning to move back. A woman milking cows told us her children and grandchildren would not move to Khevsureti—it was too difficult a life. Yet those who choose to leave Khevsureti still struggle, a fact emphasized to us by several respondents. *It is not so easy anywhere.*

1.3.2 Soviet Resettlement

Not only was Khevsureti virtually emptied by edict and the population moved *en masse* to the lowlands, but the continuity of cultural experience, such as the religious cycles and festivals was interrupted. Khevsureti's population had been in decline already for many decades, but everyone we spoke with agreed, it was the resettlements that changed everything.

According to two middle-aged men, their generation was the first to have been born and raised in the post-settlement Khevsur world. *Yes, the Soviets were around before World War 2, they told us, but they didn't really take control of the region until afterwards.*

The communists didn't care what the peasants did, they explained, but if you wanted a job, you'd better not be caught participating in any religious traditions or rituals. Joining the party was necessary for being considered for job openings. Everyone was telling on each other, and if one person

overlooked even one thing, the other would report them. It was the communists, they said, who put a stop to the practices and the rituals—now we no longer know them.

We were surprised to find that no one we interviewed spoke of the resettlements as violent or genocidal. Some elderly respondents dismissed the idea that they were forceful at all and spoke of them as well-intentioned acts of Soviet benevolence. Yet within the same interviews, these times were also described as a time of pain and difficulty in which mountain people could not adapt to the lowlands. Khevsurs who had grown up with clean mountain air, could not survive in the hot climate, working vineyards. They became sick. They had been used to wearing clothes they had made themselves. The water they found to be intolerable. Some flourished, some came back, and others died.

In Roshka, one man recited a poem by a Khevsur who wrote about living in the lowlands after losing one's home during this time:

մյ ծարո մյօդյօնինցւլա	The valley is my step-mother,
մյ Շյբ, Շյբ մյ շանալվլյեծո	As I worry about you, and you about me.
մտօյլո պմտուա,	A mountain man without a mountain, without
պմֆոնձլուա	parents.
մտա պմզոլյեծո մմոնձյելո	The mountain, a parent without children.
ասյ զարտ մտառ մյ գա Շյբ	This is how we are, me and you,
պյըրտմանցետուտ ոծլյեծո	As orphans without each other.

One elderly respondent, a child during this time, believed the resettlements had been conducted in cooperation with the locals, who visited their future homes in the lowlands beforehand and participated in the decision-making process. After the resettlement some returned, she told us.

There was no money or work, and the government changed its policy and gave money to encourage return. Yet upon returning, people no longer liked it in the mountains. Most went back down. Her family was one of the only to stay.

We were not able to get to the bottom of these incongruent feelings about the resettlements. The only people able to recall them at all had been children when they took place. No doubt their parents had put on a brave face as they were all told that whatever the policy was, it was in place for their own good. It should also be remembered that while the Soviet atrocities throughout the Caucasus rise to the level of crimes against humanity, not all peoples suffered equally. It is conceivable that, while for many Khevsurs the move was unbearable, others may have found the promise of prosperity and modern living an attractive alternative to the difficult life of the mountains. But whatever the local feelings were at the time, it is clear they were *told* to move—not asked.

One woman, 71 years old, told us her parents were Khevsurs, but she had grown up in the lowlands nearby, in Dusheti, and had worked in a factory. She moved to Khevsur as a bride, hated the long distance, and hadn't wanted to marry into the mountains, yet consented, on her parent's advice. In contrast to what we heard from others, she felt nothing much had changed in Khevsureti. When asked what living in Khevsureti was like, said only *it is difficult here, for someone who grew up down there.*

This is perhaps the best indicator of the deleterious effect on communal identity of the resettlements: within the same village, one Khevsur feels the world was changed irrevocably forever, and another, who had spent childhood in the lowlands, could not even see what had changed.

1.3.3 The Loss of Old Ways and a New Cultural Identity:

Most young people don't really have faith in this, I mean, maybe I also don't have faith, but I like this tradition. Like in Shatili, we have *Atengenoba*, like when we are boiling beer and most villagers are going back for these three days, and they are staying there, and they have fun, and you can drink and a lot of old friend to see... So it's good for us, holding to each other, to see once a year, and also you keep your tradition ... I think we have to keep alive, because it's something what only just you have, not everyone else, so I think the have to keep this.

— Koba Chincharauli (25 years old) Tbilisi, June 3, 2017

Khevsureti has nearly emptied, yet every year many individuals from the lowlands return to the *Khati* of their families. They reunite with their village and participate in the ceremonies and sacrifices. While summer festivals such a *Khatoba* and *Atengenoba* are still held, other traditional festivals are no longer celebrated. *Khatoba has also changed*, one respondent said. *There are no longer bells, no flags, no Khutsesi, no Khelosani—only the holy beer.*

An older man in his 70s said after his generation is gone, he doubted if anyone would slaughter animals or go to the *Khati*. *We know less than our parents, and our children will know less than us. Back then, there was no use for money*, he explained. *One only went to Tbilisi to buy rugs or belts. Now everything needs money, to get food, etc.*

An elderly woman said her grandchildren from the lowlands have trouble understanding her accent. Another told us of a younger man who had received the call from the *Khati* to become a *Khevisberi* but was too busy now. *Those of us above 50 are trying to maintain the traditions*, one man said, *yet they are being forgotten. European traditions are coming in now—liberal traditions. Nowadays, we live the same lifestyle as in Tbilisi.*

The Khevsur priest is gone now, we heard time and again—no real *Khevisberi* are left. Yet, in some villages one can ask after the local *Khevisberi*, and get a name, a description, and have his home pointed out. When asking for clarification over this apparent contraction, we were told that for the ceremonies and Khevsur holidays, yes, there is a man who will play the role of the *Khevisberi*. But the Khevsur prayers and ceremonies have been forgotten, and the *Khati* are no longer strong—much is no longer observed.

One such person, a seventy-nine-year-old man in upper Khevsureti told us he was a *Khevisberi*. He recounted for us how he was visited in a vision by the *Khati* and had received his calling. Now he hoped the *Khati* would forgive him, as he was old and unable to fulfil all his duties, and no one was

available to replace him. Later, a young man from Shatili, laughed and shook his head, telling us this man was not a real *Khevisberi* at all, just a crazy old man.

Khevsur youth live largely between two worlds now: the lowlands and their traditional homes in Khevsureti. A high school student we spoke with in Gudani told us he did not have much interest in the celebrations. He was interested in sports, training every day and following players and competitions. We asked if the new generation of Khevsurs were interested in the traditional ways.

A lot of them are interested, he said, *but because they have not been here*. He was less interested, he said, because he was always there. His interpretation of our question was telling—for him, traditional Khevsur culture was not an internal experience for navigating life. He associated it with lowland people wishing to reconnect to their heritage.

1.3.4 Repopulation?

Georgia was in turmoil in the 1990s, and many folks told us they were glad to be in the Khevsureti during this time, with all the chaos and confusion happening below. In the post-Soviet 90s, people lost savings, their jobs, crime and gangsterism were rampant, and suicide was a familiar tragedy. Yet in Khevsureti, we were told, it was peaceful: *we had food, and no one bothered us*. As things in Georgia stabilized, people began leaving Khevsureti.

In 2015, the Georgian parliament passed the Law on the Development of Mountainous Regions. The stated purpose of this law is to encourage mountainous peoples throughout Georgia to stay in their communities, including Svaneti, Racha, Kazbegi, Khevsureti, and Tusheti. This law seeks to provide “important and substantial social, economic and business benefits, together with a guarantee of annual funds from the national budget reserved for mountain development,” according to Tengiz Shergelashvili,

former Deputy Minister of Regional Development and Infrastructure of Georgia.⁴ Included in this law are provisions that give financial aid to families with children, an increase in salaries for teachers, bonuses for doctors and nurses, partially-funded heating and electricity during winter months, increased pensions for retirees, and tax exemption status for businesses.

When asked about the law, a Barisakho geography teacher was dismissive. It might have some positive outcomes, he said, but the government should focus on improving the lives of people already living in the mountains. In his view, the law focused too much on encouraging repopulation, and not enough on the needs of the existing population.

As an example, he told us that non-local visiting teachers received twice the pay as that of local teachers in the same school. What he may have been referencing was provisions in the Law on the Development of Mountainous Regions applying specifically to teachers' salaries. Teachers participating in Ministry programs to be placed in mountain schools received a 50% increase of their existing salary, while local teachers saw an increase of 35%.⁵

Visiting the village of Chie, we found only two residents, an elderly couple working as dairy farmers, with nine cows, to help support their children and grandchildren in the lowlands. In the winter they moved their cows down and lived there, as is a common practice. *The new law does not help them at all*, the woman told us—she did not qualify based on their part time residency in the lowlands. According to the law, a Georgian citizen should live for at least 9 months a year in the high mountainous settlements to be eligible for the benefits.⁶

⁴ UNDP. "Georgia Adopts a Law on the Development of Mountainous Regions." July 31, 2015. Available at: <http://www.ge.undp.org/content/georgia/en/home/presscenter/pressreleases/2015/07/31/georgia-adopts-a-law-on-the-development-of-mountainous-regions-.html>

⁵ Agenda.ge. "Mountain Law: Benefits for Georgia's alpine population in 2016," August 3, 2015. Available at: <http://agenda.ge/news/40108/eng>

⁶ Civil.ge. "Parliament Adopts Bill on Benefits for High Mountainous Regions." July 15, 2017. Available at: <https://old.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=28444>

Yet many young people told us they wished to live in Khevsureti and expressed hope they would be able to work in the tourism industry. *It's becoming hard to live in Tbilisi*, one young man from Shatili mentioned. *There are too many people now, and it's better to move back.*

1.4 Khevsureti Today

1.4.1 Property Rights

You should see this [process]! Why don't I rebuild the house? Because I need a project plan—this requires land, and [technically] I don't have a land, so I can't get a project plan. How can I start building? What if someone comes and demolishes it because it is not legal or fines me? Nobody is able to title the land or a house. Nobody here has anything registered under their name. We received this notification from time to time that the documentation is being looked for.... I don't get what documentation they are looking for! Nobody has ever given us any documentation here, not on the land, nor on the towers. We all know what land belongs to whom here. We know this orally. Those people are confused!

—Nodar Chinchareuli, resident of Shatili village and former Shatili *gamgebeli*⁷

If a day arrives in which land can be cut up and sold off to outsiders, Khevsureti may still go by the name Khevsureti, but the name will refer to something very different. As for now, property ownership is a bureaucratic quagmire, with most Khevsurs having little in the way of documentation or legal recognition of their rights to lands that have belonged to their families and communities for hundreds of years.

Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, large scale land reforms were enacted to help privatize property. These reforms began in 1992, and when they had officially ended, many areas had been left out, especially in high mountains including Khevsureti, Tusheti, Racha, and Svaneti. The cumbersome and pricey process for registering land has become a significant barrier for many people in remote communities.

⁷ YouTube. “ნოდარ ჭინჭარაული - ხევსურეთში ვერავინ ვერ იფორმებს ვერც მიწას და ვერც სახლს.” Video uploaded on Dec 8, 2017, REG TV. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mN9f7riUNKM>

As the quote from Nodar Chinchareuli above demonstrates, this sense of property limbo increases the sense of risk in the minds of residents wishing to invest in their own properties while engendering a sense of insecurity. As he describes it, Khevsureti residents face their own irresolvable bureaucratic technicalities when attempting to put their land in their own name, as they are unable to provide documentation required to create the judicial basis on which to register.

During our interviews we were told that, even today, a non-Khevsur could never move to Khevsureti without approval of the community, as even Khevsurs were not allowed to swap villages. The notion that non-Khevsurs might move in, buy up land, set up hotels, restaurants, and businesses was unthinkable. “No one would allow non-Khevsur to settle here,” one man told us. “I could not even move to another village. *This is my village.*”

1.4.2 Do Schools Contribute to Outmigration and Compromise Culture?

The need for education of children is a strong but often underappreciated pressure acting on mountainous populations. Legal and ethical worries meet real-world constraints when it comes to delivering education in mountainous areas. Not surprisingly, no one we interviewed expressed a belief that children should be deprived of education so that they might live according to the traditions of their ancestors.

Khevsureti has two schools today, one in Barisakho in Lower Khevsureti, and one in Shatili, in Upper Khevsureti. For a population so dispersed, steep and unpaved roads and winter conditions make school attendance a constant challenge for families with children.

In Lower Khevsureti, this problem is partially solved by the Barisakho boarding school. Middle and high school-aged children from throughout lower Khevsureti stay on all week, returning home for weekends and holidays. This arrangement still presents a twice-weekly transportation challenge, and bad weather can keep children away from school for long stretches, or else keep them trapped at the

school on weekends. We were told 64 children are currently attending the school, whereas 35 years ago there were 360 pupils.

While separating children from their families for much of the year is not ideal for children of any age, for very young children it is virtually impossible. In Akhieli, a mother of three told us Barisakho school would require a 28-kilometer trip by horse to Roshka, followed by another 38 kilometers by bus to Barisakho. Formally Akhieli had had a school for the youngest children—her father-in-law had been a teacher there. This school had served the villages throughout Arkhoti Valley for first through fourth grades, after which the older children would travel to the regional boarding school. But as more people left, the school closed down, making it even more difficult to stay.

The experience of a standardized education is one of the great eliminators of diversity in modern society, and the question of facilitating public education services while protecting cultural identity has generated much research and discussion.⁸ Once all children have more or less the same educational experience with a state-sanctioned curriculum, culture will be greatly eroded, and outmigration made much easier.

When asked if development in Khevsureti would negatively affect culture, one respondent dismissively pointed out that it was standardized education in the Soviet times that had done away with the old ways, *already*. Once everyone is sitting in the same classrooms, she said, learning the same things throughout childhood, they *are* of the same culture.

1.4.3 Frustration with Government

During the interviews, much frustration was directed at the government. The perception of dirty dealings, incompetence, and unfulfilled promises was high. Contracts would take many years to come

⁸ See: Berry, T. & Candis, M. "Cultural Identity and Education: A Critical Race Perspective," Educational Foundation. 2013; and Wyman, L., Reyes, I. & Arenas, A. "When Indigenous and Modern Education Collide," World Studies in Education. 2009.

together, we were told, only to fall through. In Barisakho, government administrative offices were in such poor condition that they were essentially unusable. When meetings took place, local officials preferred to use the school library. When we complemented the good condition of the classrooms, we had glimpsed through the window at the Barisakho school, we were told that it had taken many years and several contracts to remodel only two rooms.

Yet what rural area is not unhappy with the central government? Virtually all rural areas have good reason to feel their well being is not a priority. It is not the feeling of discontentment, but the content of the complaints that help a researcher understand the local situation.

1.4.4 Need for Medical Services

An ever-present worry expressed by respondents was Khevsureti's limited access to medical services and the poor or non-existent roads making any emergency trip incredibly challenging. While Barisakho does have a clinic, elderly residents with chronic ailments are only able to receive treatment in the lowlands. Any situation for which response-time was an essential factor will make a simple but vital medical need a matter of life and death.

In Ardoti we were told of a recent incident where a child had needed immediate medical attention, and a helicopter had to be called. This incident had ended well, but villagers were apprehensive. *There is no other option in an emergency, and what if the helicopter is not free or the weather is bad?* A much sadder story was told about a boy a few years ago who had fallen through the ice and needed medical attention. They had called the helicopter at 8 am, but when the helicopter finally arrived at 1 pm, there was only a body.

This line of questioning led to a moment of dark humor between the two interviewees. "What if your appendix bursts?" one man asked. His answer: you'd better have a mirror. "How do you know what to remove?" Simply take out what hurts when you're open.

1.4.5 Livelihoods and the Challenges of Winter

On June 3, 2017, our first day in Khevsureti, we were headed up to Shatili when we fell into conversation with two Khevsur men and a woman and began asking our first questions. What is Khevsureti like today? How do people live? Do they care for tourists?

One man, who turned out to be the mayor of Shatili, laughed when we asked about what kind of jobs were available. *The only place to work is at the school. And there we have more employees than children!*

The best outcome for a young man staying in Khevsureti, we often heard, was to get a job with the border guard. Many people we spoke with had a son, father or brother, and all border guards were men, while women worked as administrators, doctors, and nurses. Khevsurs are given preference for border guard positions, and the families with such salaries were noticeably better off.

Outside working for the state, such as in the school or border guard, cattle and tourism are the only income sources. The main agricultural activity in Khevsureti is dairy production. Most families own at least a few cows, and for those without jobs in the lowlands or government positions, dairy farming was the primary source of income. Dairy products include cheese, yogurt, butter, and *khacho*, a kind of cottage cheese. Products are either transported to be sold to clients or in markets in the low lands, or sold locally in summer, often to families who rent a house in Khevsureti for a few weeks to rest in the summer. In the lowlands, “natural” dairy products from the highlands can be sold at premium. In Barisakho, Amgha, and Shatili, we also saw honey bee hives, as mountain honey is a popular product to sell in the lowlands.

The major constraint on raising cattle was winter. Every extra cow was another cow that had to be fed with purchased hay for half the year, or was a cow that had to be taken down into the lowlands during the winter. Both options represented extra costs and extra work, and for the older residents, who

make up the majority of the dairy industry in Khevsureti, ten or so cows was about as many as they could manage. “We make only enough to get by—not even that,” one man told us.

Above Barisakho, only a few people stay on, without their families, to maintain herds that endure the winters. These are herdsmen for whom the trip over the mountain becomes impossible once Datvisjvari pass closes. Only 6 or 7 people can be found there in the winter months, we were told.

Yet worse than the snow is the isolation, a winter resident from Amgha told us. Once the road gets blocked, you are cut off from the world with no cellphone and impassable mountains. In the summer, at least, one can get to a spot with service and make a call. In winter, the only option is to try to make it up to the border guard posts.

Residents told us they must also contend with wolves in winter months. They come right up to the door, a man in lower Khevsureti mentioned. Each year one or two of his cows are eaten—in the area, seven in total had been eaten the year before.

We ate well in Khevsureti, and the people we stayed with were proud of their natural products. *We have erbo, cheese, meat, onions, garlic, cucumbers—everything we harvest is very good. We don't need pesticides or herbicides. It's all natural. We only bring up flour, sugar, and salt.* Several folks spoke negatively about the way people ate in the cities, with their bad food. *They found lead in the spices, for example. They probably are putting it in the salt.*

While most families grew food, this was done almost exclusively for family consumption and was not a source of income. Growing crops required much effort with less output, plus transportation costs, leaving one with products that are not at all competitive in a lowland marketplace.

Until recently, Khevsureti was virtually unknown and unvisited, but since the 1990s, famous sites in Khevsureti have become international tourist destinations. Every year more guesthouses open and more foreigners come. We counted six in Shatili while we were there. Roshka has one large, popular guesthouse, two homestays, and several ambitious building projects. Everywhere we went, people were

willing to act as hosts and offer us room and board, and all expressed interest in engaging the tourist industry.

1.5 Traditions and Religion

In general, these things don't really contradict each other—the shrines and the churches. As I mentioned before, [Christian beliefs] were not very accurately passed down to us. A functioning church was here at one point, then later—I don't know why—it closed down. No more priests were here, no attention was paid to its maintenance, no more sermons. It is not like some people are Christians and as a result do not go to the shrines. It's not like that.

—Khevsur woman, Ardoti, approximately 40 years old, June 22, 2017

1.5.1 Syncretism

In its widest sense, syncretism denotes a system of belief resulting from the synthesis of two religious traditions. Often cited examples of syncretism include early Christian Gnostic traditions, and the religion of Manichaeism.

In popular sources, Khevsureti is said to be a place in which the remnants of a pre-Christian ancient religion can still be found, with the long-isolated Khevsurs never having fully adopted or submitted to the Orthodoxy that has dominated the majority of Georgians in the lowlands since the 4th century. While this detail has worked its way into many guidebooks and blogs, as the quote from the Khevsur woman above suggests, it is not a consensus view of Khevsurs.

Anthropologist Kevin Tuite notes this is also the view of renowned scholar Zurab Kiknadze. Tuite, paraphrasing a conversation they had in the summer of 1991, says Kiknadze considers “the paganism described here as an *innovation*, a religious system cobbled together out of Christian elements in the late middle ages, after Mongol and Persian invasions had cut off the mountains and other peripheral areas from the cultural hegemony of the Orthodox center.”⁹

This paganism of the Pshavs, Khevsurs, and Tushes, included elements of the Christian beliefs they took with them in an unchronicled migration to the mountains, as well as laterally transferred beliefs from extant mountain peoples, a phenomenon described in great detail by Kevin Tuite in *Lightning, Sacrifice, and Possession in the Traditional Religions of the Caucasus*.

⁹ Tuite, Kevin. *Violet on the Mountain: An Anthology of Georgian Folk Poetry*, University of Montreal. Footnote on pg. 6. Available at: <http://mapageweb.umontreal.ca/tuitekj/caucasus/ia/ia.pdf>

Kiknadze's perspective fits well with a major point of the thesis of James Scott's *The Art of not Being Governed*, who, writing about the mountainous peoples of Southeast Asia, describes what might be called a *civilization bias* at work in the regressive tendency to project into the peripheries of civilizations imaginative origin stories of those at the center. He says, "not so very long ago, however such self-governing peoples were the great majority of humankind. Today, they are seen from the valley kingdoms as 'our living ancestors,' 'what we were like before we discovered wet-rice cultivation, Buddhism, and civilization.'"¹⁰

While this tendency can be found in much writing about the mountainous people of Georgia today, it was the opposite view that served the historical Russian and Georgian lowlanders in their assimilation of their mountainous counterparts. Rather than see their former pagan selves, they saw a people who, without proper religious instruction, had long since fallen from an Orthodox Christianity to which they needed restoration.¹¹ This Christianizing mission found voice in the imperial geopolitics of the 18th and 19th centuries, which incorporated religious justifications in the pushback against the expansion into the Caucasus of Persian and Ottoman empires.¹²

Scholars such as Georges Charachidzé and Kevin Tuite have given these religious systems the deep analyses they deserve. This section provides only a superficial treatment in the context of our time in Khevsureti. The most visible syncretic features of Khevsureti is the blending of Orthodox saints, Christian holidays with the folkloric traditions and unique mountainous traditions surrounding the Khevsur places of worship, the *Khati* shrine. These shrines found throughout Khevsureti bear the names of both the heroes of legends, such as *lakhsar* and *Kopala*, as well as orthodox saints, such as Saint George and Saint Peter, and "the Archangel."

¹⁰ Scott, James C. *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009 Pg. IV.

¹¹ Manning, Paul. "Materiality and Cosmology." *Ethnos*, vol. 73:3, 2008. Pg. 331.

¹² Jersild, Austin. *Orientalism and Empire: North Caucasus Mountain Peoples and the Georgian Frontier, 1845-1917*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002. Pg. 38-51.

Khevsur celebrations overlap much with Orthodox celebrations, and when asked, Khevsurs did not distinguish between the two, but listed them all as their traditional celebrations; the ascension, Christmas, Easter, *Giorgoba* (St. George's day), and celebrations unique to the mountains such as *Khatoba* and *Atengenoba*.¹³ The syncretization of Orthodoxy and religious practices in Khevsureti is reflected in the religious terminology of the area itself. Khevsur shrines for example, are called *Khati*, which simply means icon, or *Jvari*, which is the Georgian word for cross.

When asked to compare Khevisberi and Orthodox priests, one elderly man near Ardoti in upper Khevsureti explained “we don’t keep holy things in our house, like priests. The holy things for Khevsurs were kept in the *Khati*. Orthodoxy is of the church, the *Khati* is of our fathers. Orthodoxy in fact calls us idolaters and condemns sacrifices.”

Near Barisakho, an elderly man, when asked if the *Khati* shrines were Christian said “Of course! They are named after Christian Saints!” Pagan shrines used to exist, he said, and some were still left, and he explained that Christianity was spread to Khevsureti during the reign of Queen Tamar (1184 to 1213) during the Golden Age of Georgia.

While still prominent in celebrations of traditions and cultural heritage, the sense of *belonging* to the *Khati* as vassals or servants is no longer a distinct feature of Khevsur identity. Yet elderly Khevsurs can still recall the days that the practices were in full swing. Now *the Khati have gone quiet*, said an old woman we spoke with in Gudani, the founding Khevsur village.

When asked about the practice of sacrifice, pagan by most accounts, he went on to explain that the Bible and both Christian and Muslim traditions are descended from Judaism, a tradition that also practiced animal sacrifice, and therefore sacrifice is very much in the Judeo-Christian tradition.

¹³ While uniquely Khevsur, we were told this holiday derives its name from a Greek word but could not find further information.

1.5.2 Orthodoxy Versus Tradition

"Our people had nothing to do with clergy. The rules were different—we had Khati. They had churches. In Roshka, there was a church and clergy lived there. It was built maybe 200 years ago. They demanded taxes and had a fight with locals, and that was the end of that. We had our own beliefs we had to follow—the Khutsesi, the Kadagi. Now the church is coming in again and you can see what is happening. It's all about money. This church—orthodoxy is nothing. They just have books they read! They repeat what is in the books! We have people who studied in Leningrad who told us about their religion. Contrast this with revelation from *Khati*!"

—Aleksi Arabuli, Chie, June 10, 2017, Age 75

Khevsureti's ambiguous history with the Georgian Orthodox Church persists to this day, and Khevsur traditional religious practices are criticized by many Orthodox Georgians, a fact that, when raised, provoked a strong reaction in many of our respondents. One young man told us (in English), *People say, oh they are killing a lot of sheep, things like that. But you are saying this in a country in which 1 percent of people are vegetarians! I mean, every day you are killing some sheep or something like that. These people who say, oh it's barbarism, after 20 minutes they go and cut off some sheep's head [to eat]. It's much better when this has a reference and so is killed for this and not just to feel full.*

Khevsurs do not perceive an incompatibility between Orthodoxy and Khati practices. Another man told us, [the people who condemn us] follow the priests and the church, but we do too! They are not sacrificing the animals. They don't believe in sacrifice. They say it is not allowed. But in following the traditions of our fathers, we still sacrifice the animals so that [the Khati] will help us, aid us, and keep us from wrong deeds.

Academic and popular sources are apt to report that the Georgian Orthodox Church condemns the animal sacrifices in the mountains. This claim has proven difficult to verify, and the church has published no official position on it. While many Orthodox people judge the sacrifices as pagan and backwards, the church takes little notice of annual festivals in which animals are known to be slaughtered for sacrifice.

For the past few years, animal rights activists in Tbilisi have protested these festivals, decrying the practice for being blasphemous, cruel to animals, and traumatic for children in attendance. These

protesters often call on the Georgian church to condemn the practice. A much-discussed YouTube video however shows the Georgian Patriarch praising the bringing of animals to the church for the purposes of feeding the poor, for celebrations, and feasting.¹⁴ Whether a tactful reframing or just coincidental pronouncement, the church's lack of response indicates reluctance, if not indifference, and its supposed antagonism, overblown.

Currently, Khevsureti has two functional Orthodox churches, one in Shatili and one in Barisakho, but the ruins of Orthodox churches can be found throughout Khevsureti. While these churches in villages like Akhieli are neglected, the ancient shrines are maintained and used during festivals. While many young people return to Khevsureti during the festivals to participate, the younger people we spoke with felt it necessary to clarify that they honored, but did not really believe, the religious traditions of their forefathers.

1.5.3 *Khati* or *Khevsur* Shrines

I heard about one tale, about Gudani's shrine. Some Georgians—Khevsurs originally, but from Tbilisi—had sacrificed animals and had a feast by the *Khati*. Then they packed up and they left. On the way, a white bird would come and sit on the windshield of the car. It kept coming back, and they would wonder, "What is that?" and "Why is that bird doing that?" And it turns out, they had actually packed those golden cups with them, that belong to Gudani [Gudani's *Khati*]. And so they turned around and they brought the cups back.

—Khatuna, approximately 45 years old. Akhieli, July 12, 2017

The word *shrine* can be misleading, as the *Khati* shrines are not just places dedicated to the honor or worship of their namesake, such as *lakhsari* or *Kopala* or Saint Giorgi, but were also terrestrial manifestations of the personage. The *Khati* is both the shrine *and* the being, in name, person, and in place. This sets it apart from typical religious objects, such as an Orthodox icon or shrine in a church, for which the subject of the icon is distinct from the icon itself. *Khati* were places of worship, places of sacrifice, and centers of a dangerous and protective power. A *Khati* may grow angry. They may become

¹⁴ In Georgian, ტრაპეზი, “t’rapazi,” a word referring to religious feasting following periods of fasting.

offended. They might act, such as by killing or protecting. They are personages and they are places. The Khevsurs belonged to their *Khati* as subjects—the Khevsur is a vassal of the *Khati*.

The *Khati shrines* are small buildings, sometimes with alters and adjacent structures for brewing the holy beer. They are most often small and simple stone constructions with terraced roofs and inner chambers in which the *Khati* objects are kept. These holy objects include flags and chalices, as well as Orthodox icons such as Jesus Christ, Saint Nino, and Saint George.

One man we spoke with distinguished these sharply from conventional liturgical objects, saying unlike orthodox paraphernalia, these could not be kept in one's house or used by just anybody. Violating the *Khati* in this way, he said, would result in misfortune for the offender—slipping and falling to one's death for example, or finding oneself in the path of a deadly avalanche. *Without Khati*, we were told, *one is like an animal wondering around without an owner, unprotected*. Another person told us, *we sacrifice so that Khati helps us, protects us, for example, to save from car accident by guiding you*. If someone drowns in river or dies in avalanche, the belief is the soul is claimed by the devil and you must go pray at *Khati*, and sacrifice animals to release their soul.¹⁵

Khevsur folklore describes the feats of these heroes in much detail, many of the stories focusing on their triumphs over the *devi*. Khevsureti mythology is filled with stories of *devs*, antagonistic village-dwelling creatures often translated as “ogre,” who fought with, and were eventually driven out by, the Khevsur demigods, *lakhsari*, *Kopala*, and *Pirkushi*. Do Khevsurs believe in the *devi* today? We spoke with only few who outright denied their existence, and many thought they must have some basis in history (see section 1.5.1).

¹⁵ This is described by Kevin Tuite, pg. 20, in *Lightning, Sacrifice, and Possession*. Drawing from Charachidze, Tuite discusses the role of sacrifice and appeasement play in Khevsur beliefs, in which demigod *Kopala* circulates among celestial, terrestrial and subterrestrial worlds, during the course of which he may act as a liberator of souls, with ceremonies involving the incantations of a *Kadagi*. In Pshavi, also the slaughter of a goat may also appease demons that might otherwise interfere.

Khevsureti belongs to Khevsurs because they are vassals of these demigods and shrines, who drove out the *devi* for the sake of the Khevsurs.¹⁶ As Paul Manning puts it, “the appropriation of spaces for humans from the *devi* … by these shrine divinities is marked by the shrine themselves.”¹⁷

“Some people don't believe something will happen to you if you disrespect *Khati*, a man in Barisakho told us. “But you can't even hunt near this. I remember I was hunting, following the animal and lost track of where I was. I went into *Khati* territory. That night I had nightmare, I was crying and shouting—I connected the two events.”

Another respondent told us, “[The *Khati*] will keep away misfortune, such as death. For example, you might be heading for a car accident, but the angel will guide you a different way—so the heart and the mind will dictate to you. And they will save you, those that know that you are in harm's way—things like that, so that you don't fall into danger and get killed. This is the sort of thing I ask for.”

Yet the *Khati* have changed, we were told. *They would once get angry, and punish those who had not followed, but no longer. People no longer practice, pray, or serve.* The responses we received varied widely. The cooks in our guesthouse in Korsha village, for example, warned us the *Khati* were very dangerous. We were told by some it was forbidden for anyone to go. An elderly man who acted as *Khevisberi* for sacrifices at the festivals, told us one could go and see the *Khati*, but there was not much point except on the holidays. Another villager offered to open up the shrine himself and let me look around and take photos.

Each village has one or more *Khati* at which local families might worship, and rules governing who belongs to which *Khati* are difficult to grasp by outsiders.¹⁸ Shrines are closely associated with family names, and Khevsurs having left their village remained yoked to their respective shrines. One

¹⁶ Kiknadze, Zurab. Anduzebi. Tbilisi. 2009.

¹⁷ Paul Manning. *Materiality and Cosmology: Old Georgian Churches as Sacred, Sublime, and Secular Objects*. Ethnos, 73:3, Pg. 348.

¹⁸ This conceptualization of land is shared by many highland tribes of north-eastern Georgia and it is described at length by virtually all ethnographers of the region, especially Zurab Kiknadze and Georges Charachidzé.

woman we spoke to in Akhieli village explained her shrine was at the village of Batsaligo—the shrine for Arabuli, her surname and clan. Her village, Mudzmai, also had its own shrine to which she belonged, the shrine of the Archangel. In Bakhao, an elderly man told us many come up from valley for sacrifice, for holy days, worship—they were the vassals of *this Khati*, of the Murghuevi¹⁹ and Dkhviaduri.

A middle-aged woman told us: *Woman are still allowed only to go to certain places, while the men would go up to the Khati, for eating and drinking.* They would come together as one group later, “if they became bored.” Yet, another respondent said that at the most recent *Ascension* holiday, women too went up the *Khati*, and sat and drank, adding “everyone should empty their drinks before leaving.”

When asked about the restrictions placed on women, another respondent said, “There are also places where a man also can't go! —only the *khevisberi* can go.” To trespass on these norms is to risk misfortune.

“It's hard to say, when bad things happen, if they happen because of *the Khati*,” he explained. “Because maybe you just think this.” A teenager we spoke with in Gudani told us that to go behind the *Khati* in Gudani was forbidden. We asked why. “Probably because they kept the treasures there,” he offered, “and only few people would know about it.”

Taking from the *Khati*, we were told, is a provocation. There was another man from Arkhoti that stole things from the *Khati*, we were told, and the *Khati* didn't forgive him and sent him misfortune. He drowned in the river.

Two specific anecdotes of the danger of the *Khati* were told to us by a respondent in Barisakho. Both stories involved misfortune befalling communists.

The first took place in 1921. Russian soldiers came in Khevsureti. (This was likely a reference to the Red Army Invasion of Georgia, which overthrew the Menshevik government in Georgia which sat in

¹⁹ A respondent from Ardoti had this last name of Murghuevi, which resembles Chechen names. According to him, other Khevsurs with the last name Murghuevi often gave it as Ardoti, for example at university, so as to avoid discrimination.

office for less than one year.) Two of these Russians went up the hill to the *Khati* and rang the bell, not knowing what they were doing. Immediately after, they began to quarrel and fight, and both died.

Another story told of how when the Barisakho school was opened, the communist party members took the bell from the shrine. They had locals with them—8 students, the youngest in 8th grade. It was then as if these 8 Khevsurs were all cursed, as they had great difficulty producing sons, only to have the sons die. Only one of the students grew up to have a son, and that son did not have son—only daughters, we were told. The father of this son was the man who had finally replaced the bell. “Absolutely all 8! Really strange,” he said, ending the story.

While several *Khati* shrines are maintained and in use, many have fallen into a state of disrepair. For the few villagers who lived near a neglected *Khati*, the mention of its condition proved a sore spot, followed by excuses and plans for restoration. In Bakhao village in Ardoti settlement, an elderly man described how the roof of their *Khati* had collapsed now, but Khevsurs from the valley would soon fix it with a new roof. “What has changed?” we asked. *Before we used to do everything, flags, bells, but those people have died, and people no longer serve the Khati. The main ones have fallen down and are in need of renovation.*

In Amgha of Arkhoti valley, two *Khati* are visible on the right, before entering the village (figure 1). Both are in states of disrepair (figure 2).



Figure 1. *Khati* in Amgha village in Arkhoti Valley.



Figure 2. Amgha *Khati* in state of disrepair.

1.5.4 Religious offices

"When I was younger, *Khevisberi* were here. Now, not anymore. No one knows the blessings. They just come and slaughter animals. The prayers they say now are similar to "Holy Fathers" [orthodox prayers]."

"But there are people who fulfil this function?" we asked. "You personally?"

"Yes, I am forced to—to slaughter animals. I do not want to take on any other roles—it's not done—it's not right."

—Barisakho respondent, June 14th, 2017

This section seeks to record what our interviewees described about these religious offices now at a time when Khevsurs report many things have been lost and forgotten, and there are no true *Khevisberi* left. The offices respondents describe to us were the *Dasturi*, *Khevisberi*, *Khutsesi*, and *Kadabi*.

Today, *Dasturi* are selected randomly, one interviewee reported. Another told us that at Gudani, families took turns. The duties of the *Dasturi* described included acting as a host, the one who provides and slaughters animals, and prepares and provides the holy beer. The one playing the role of the *Dasturi*, we were told, is the only one that can invite others, as he is responsible for them. *He must know they won't start fights, or cuss and fight in front of the Khati.*

When your turn comes, a respondent told us, you must boil the holy beer and serve it to whomever comes. In the old days it was up to the *Kadagi* who would be host. The last *Kadagi* died two years ago and was not replaced.

The people who practice the ways of *Khevisberi* are gone now, we were told. "We don't really know this anymore." The *Khevisberi* were those who would lead the ceremonies, cut the sweet bread, and say the prayers. These prayers were taught to them by the *Khati* themselves.

"There have been cases when people write down these prayers to read," one man said, "for the sake of someone who wanted to be *Khevisberi*, to memorize the prayer. But this doesn't work... It doesn't work because you must be chosen. You can't just do this because you want to."

Another man told us that to become *Khevisberi*, you must have a vision. The *Khati* visits you and calls you to serve it. After such a dream, he said, you must then be confirmed by the *Kadabi*, "the one who prophesies."

Our conversation with a young man from Gudani touched upon another theme we encountered consistently. The *Khevisberi* that were not really *Khevisberi*. His grandfather's brother, Giorgi was a *Khevisberi*. And yet when we pushed him on this he clarified. He is not actually *Khevisberi*, he said. *He knows about it and knows how to pray but does not perform all the duties of Khevisberi.*

1.5.5 Khevsur Holy Days and Celebrations

The best [celebrations] were those when they would go to the *Khati*—the bells would ring—the procession to the *Khati*. We have three *Khati* for this village...

One is Iakhsari's... And then The Archangel Who Came Down and... The third, Peter's. That is the *Khati* up there [on the mountain side]. And also, up there is the Alcove for the Mother of God on the other side. And for all of these we boil beer, and take out flags, as we call them, kept in the shrine, and the vestments, the bells would ring at the end. The Khutsesi, as we called him, would oversee, and standing by his side was the *Khelosani*, who would be with the Khutsesi.

Three of them were there, the *Khelosani*, who would take the flags from inside, from the inner chamber. The *Khelosani* were in charge of the flags. All three of the shrines had flags. They would take them out of the chamber and set them up. Next to the chamber were places for them, and all three flags would be put there. Afterwards, when the *Khatoba* [shrine festival] was over, they would take them out again. The Khutsesi would complete the ceremony, and then they would put them away until the next *Khatoba*.

And then in this way, they would continue on. For us, there was nothing so joyous as this here in Arkhoti. We had no radio, no cassette player—and what would a television ever be doing here? We were just waiting, all the boys and girls, for the next upcoming *Khatoba*.

So we would have fun here. These were good times, drinking the holy beer, drinking the beer, having fun, the accordion, the panduri. They were joyous times, good times.

—Sandua Tsiklauri, age 87, Amgha, Arkhoti Valley

During July, *Atengenoba* is the Khevsureti-wide traditional festival that takes place over a week in July. As mentioned above, the accounts we were given of the functions and selection processes for traditional roles in the celebration differed from the accounts described in historical and ethnographic works from the past. These offices are performed by laymen now.

Elderly respondents told us that many festivals are no longer celebrated or are now practiced differently. Christmas for example, while still observed on January 14, the traditional day of Christmas

throughout Georgia, is no longer celebrated in a traditional way. Formerly, men would get up early, before the rest of the village, and gather at the *Khati*.

One man recalled that for New Year, when he was a child, they would get up early in the cold and go to the *Khati* together, performing the duties of the ritual silently and efficiently. They would then return to their families, “bringing back holiness from the *Khati*,” to their family members who were just waking up. The whole village would then celebrate in their houses and visit each other over the following week, moving from house to house, drinking vodka and beer, *but more often vodka, as beer is difficult to brew in winter.*

One respondent described the celebrations as follows: Usually everyone goes to the shrine on the holy days, yet women stand farther way. Women bake goods to take the *Khati*, and also bring food and drinks to the men. Villagers often then participate in traditional dancing. For the children, small *kada*, a kind of thick cake-bread, are prepared and thrown to children in a kind of game. Children compete to get the most.

1.5.6 Holy Beer

Khevsureti departs from Georgia’s ancient wine making traditions and is famous instead for its holy beer brewing customs. Beer is boiled for celebrations and a year after someone has died.

Brewing and drinking holy beer are important parts of celebrations and are properly done in specially designated buildings near the *Khati*. Traditionally, we were told, it is the *Dasturi* in charge of brewing beer and offering it to those who come to the *Khati*.

Beer advertisers now use this association to promote cheap lagers, such as featuring actors in traditional mountain costumes engaging in caricatures of mountain fighting, followed by drinking beers with mountain names, such as Kazbegi and Mtieli.

1.5.7 Devs

Khevsureti is known in Georgia for its beliefs in *devs*, antagonistic village-dwelling creatures, commonly, depicted as humanoid but giant, yet with legs turned backwards. Khevsureti folklore features many stories of *devs*, particularly their fights with the Khevsur demigods, Iakhsari, Kopala, and Pirkushi.

Did they really exist? we asked. The answers we received from elderly people were often inconclusive. They became self-conscious. Being asked by outsiders (one clearly a foreigner), no doubt brought out their most agnostic self. *It's difficult to say*, one respondent told us. *They say they became invisible*. Another told us that an archeologist had uncovered a giant shin bone from a cemetery there, *a shin bone the height of person—perhaps it is a Dev's shin*.

No one told us they had seen one, but most had heard stories from others who said they have. Some say *devs* would sneak in at night to drink the holy beer. *Some might be surprised if you say you believe in devs*, we were told. *They might say, how can you believe? But if you believe, you make connections with things that happen*.

An elderly woman told us a story about a man from her village who said he had run into a *dev*: this man had killed another man, from the village Juta, and when he saw a figure on the road, he was at first afraid it was men from Juta looking for revenge. Then there was a horrible smell, and the figure began to crow. Then this man called to the *Khati*, and the *Khati* killed the *dev* with a pillar of fire.

1.5.8 Existential Threats

The people we spoke with in Khevsureti did not attribute the loss of culture and identity to development in Khevsureti or the incoming tourists. On the contrary, it was outmigration due to lack of good roads, the lure of modern comforts, and opportunities for work that was seen as the most serious existential threat. *Once young people are educated at university, the idea of living like their ancestors is absurd*, one man told us. Today, the desire to live in Khevsureti is the desire to lead a modern life in a

home with deep cultural and historical values but does not include of trying to live up to a romantic ideal of the past.

1.6 Tourism in Khevsureti

1.6.1 Local Experience of Growing Tourism

“Khevsureti is becoming empty,” a man in Barisakho told us. “It is good if [tourists] know about us and come—and it helps people earn money.” It is a good thing tourist come, we were told unanimously: people will have hotels and income, taxi services and stores. They will sell embroideries and souvenirs.

Khevsureti’s growing popularity as a tourist destination offers a potential livelihood for some Khevsurs able to act as guides, drivers, work in restaurants, or as guesthouse hosts. More tourists come to Khevsureti every year—the season was starting earlier and ending later. “In Shatili everyone has a guesthouse,” one man told us, exaggerating. “They have so much demand now they are constructing new buildings.”

When asked if outsiders might come in and take advantage of the growing tourism in Khevsureti, local people said they could not imagine this happening. Only Khevsurs can earn money from tourism, they told us, as no non-Khevsur could move there without permission.

In Arkhoti Valley, residents were excited about the pass that was under construction and the tourism it might bring to the area. *We can make guesthouses*, they said. Arkhoti valley has only a horse path, but a road is being constructed now. Backpackers sometimes showed up in the valley, needing food and lodging. *It would also be a good way for young people to earn some extra money in the summer*, they said.

One woman in Arkhoti shared with us her desire to make a guesthouse and cafe for tourists. She hoped the road down to Ardoti would bring more tourists. She was confident they would love it there:

the nature, the high mountains. The food is all natural and fresh, she told us, especially the milk. No pesticides. *We just plant and that's it. Milk, butter, khacho, cheese, everything is natural.*

As it is, in Arkhoti, bringing materials over the mountains is too difficult as there is not yet any road. And there are other families that can host people. *My relatives live here, and they also have capacity. Everyone would like to have some sort of income from tourists.*

While happy that tourists were coming, a man in Barisakho mentioned it made little difference to their village—the tourists are usually passing by. Barisakho had little that would be of interest to them.

No one expressed any great impatience or annoyance with the tourism industry, and when asked, a common afterthought we heard was along the lines of *in fact it's the Georgians who come here are disrespectful and drunk and leave a mess, not the foreigners.*

Many young people we spoke with pinned hopes on tourism. They saw it as something they could do. One boy we asked told us he didn't know what he wanted to be when he grew up. *A border guard? "Perhaps—why not?" A sportsman? "I'd prefer that." Where do you want to live? "I don't know. Probably here." In Tbilisi? "There as well."*

Yet when asked about university, his real thoughts about his future came out. He wanted to study business he said, specifically tourism as it pertained to Khevsureti. He thought he could organize tour to different places and talk about the Khevsur culture and traditions. He said he would promote it all through the internet.

The preoccupation with the hoped-for benefits of tourism made discussion of its potential negative effects difficult. When asked about possible downsides, respondents often had not thought about it before, yet the downsides were sometimes arrived at obliquely. "We are very hospitable" one woman told us. "It is intensified by the fact there is no road [to Arkhoti]. If people come to Arkhoti, our children see them and are very happy, and so people are more hospitable than others."

"People are not as close to each other anymore," a young man from Shatili told us. "They just stay in their houses now."

A father told that, in trying to teach his children Khevsur values of hospitality, sometimes tourists' insistence on leaving money made things difficult. He told us of a time in which he invited some foreigners into their house for lunch, and refused to take any money, yet they gave the money to his children outside, while leaving. This he felt was disrespectful to Khevsur culture.

The difference between Shatili and the rest of Khevsureti was unmistakable. Shatili, as the main Khevsureti tourist destination, was one of the only places where we felt ourselves sometimes to be a nuisance. We were treated with impatience when requesting interviews. Interviews were regularly declined. A few weeks before a group of Peace Corps volunteers had stayed at our guesthouse, run by a wonderfully kind hostess, a grandmother name Jujuna. They had been generally rowdy and argumentative about the prices they were quoted. One boy said he saw them running around naked at night, and he was dismayed by their behavior.

Although loss of sense of community and interdependency is a likely consequence of tourism development, respondents were quick to point out that almost no one lives in Khevsureti now anyway. In the context of such extreme outmigration, these concerns unfortunately become largely beside the point.

1.6.2 Shatili

Shatili is the site that receives the most international interest in Khevsureti with nearby Mutso as a close second. Both sites feature an enormous tower-fortress complex still stands. The towers are largely uninhabited, but some have been converted into rooms that can be rented. One tower is even a well-advertised guesthouse. According to a local, in Shatili four towers have habitable rooms.

The majority of Shatili residents live in typical Georgian village housing above the tower fortress. More recently, houses have been built below the complex, across the river, and on the road

approaching Shatili. Many of these are new guesthouses. Every year the tourism season lengthens as more and more tourists come. *Tourism is very good*, people told us. *People are no longer interested in farming, and a school salary is too low to support a family—tourism provides this additional income.*

We found many causes for concern in the lack of management plans and restoration projects at this key heritage site. The towers in Shatili for example are becoming increasingly vulnerable to collapse. Several towers with telltale signs of severe deterioration and instability were pointed out to us. “They get worse every year,” a young man said. “If they don’t fall, you’ll take a look, and there is another crack.” When we arrived in Shatili in July of 2017, a tower had collapsed the week before.

According to the locals, after a poorly implemented tower restoration project, water no longer drains at the corner, but instead pools on the flat roofs and runs off down the walls, eroding clay and undermining their structural integrity. In the winter, damp walls make the diurnal frost/thaw cycle particularly destructive. Not only does this put at risk these priceless sites, but also presents a serious safety concern for tourists visiting. “They go in,” one man told us, “not realizing they are so unstable.”

1.7 Conclusion: Development and Return

Few things affect every aspect of rural life as much as a road. Roads are an unceasing source of frustration and an ever-present topic of conversation for those who live at the end of a bad one. A talk I once sat in on at Cornell was attended by a woman who grew livid by what she saw of as the reach of globalization, its tentacle-like roads, meddling in happy lives to the detriment of local culture. Whatever its merits, Khevsureti locals couldn’t be less sympathetic to this view.

Frets over the collateral damages of development are often valid but thrown into sharp contrast when interacting with real people. For example, asking a man in Roshka if road building was a threat to Khevsur culture, prompted this impassioned response: “Why don’t we ask the guy up there, who has to come all the way here by car, then get out and go another 25 kilometers on horse? It’s him who gets caught in the rain after carrying flour all the way up the mountain, when the weather turns, the flour’s

ruined, and he has to show up to his family empty-handed ... We want it both ways—we want people living up there, but we don't want to build a road. It doesn't work like that, does it? It is the 21st century after all. People should not be struggling to survive with the help of some horses and donkeys. The food! Just the basic food is all I'm talking about. I'm not even talking about anything else—just the food to feed his family."

A high school student we spoke with captured it well in his characteristic taciturn way:

"And what about the future of Khevsureti?" we asked.

"The main thing is the road."

"Will they make a good road one day, do you think?"

"They are planning to start this year."

"Do they always say that, and never do?"

"Yes. That's true."

At times, it seemed as if Khevsurs saw a road as a panacea. *We have been promised a road for so long*, people told us. *Everything would be so much better, if we only had a road*: better access to hospitals, much easier to live and stay in winter, a way to bring goods up, and take them down to sell. *What if someone is sick?* they said.

The roads in Khevsureti are dirt roads, often washed out the farther up one goes. They are terribly bumpy, making traveling the short distance to the low lands an ordeal. *If there was a road and school, people would live here*, was a common sentiment. As it is, one bad storm can change everything. everything can change.

The challenges identified by people in Khevsureti were the same: poor electricity; poor roads; difficulty getting food; difficulty making a living. Would modernity compromise Khevsur culture? we asked. Wouldn't culture be lost if Khevsureti was as connected as everywhere else?

The answer we received was universal pushback. Is it not the people who live here who maintain the culture? And who will stay here if there is not a road? It is too difficult to live without a road, we heard time and again. We don't have a phone signal as it is! What are we to do in case of emergency?

Our respondents repeatedly told us they wished for the return of people to Khevsureti. It is becoming too expensive and difficult to live in Tbilisi, one young man told us. People would like to move back. If they had a reason to come back, some livelihood, they would, because they are often under-employed anyway. People universally expressed hope that people would return, and that a new road would bring them.

It was agreed however that traditional livelihoods would not be enough. Elderly people are unable to continue taking care of animals, and young people had no interest in taking over hard agricultural work.

Everyone we spoke to agreed: to maintain Khevsureti will require improving the lives of the people who wish to continue living there. Only one man, who had lived in Khevsur as a child, yet was now a Western-educated man working in bank in Tbilisi, expressed ambivalence. While development, such as the building of roads, brought some benefit, they also undermined and damaged local culture. When we raised his concerns in Khevsureti we were told, only *people who don't live here speak that way. If they moved here and lived here, they would stop talking that way, because its very difficult to live here without a road.*

Chapter 2: Development Policy and Projects in Khevsureti

The past few years have seen an active effort by the Georgian government to develop its mountainous region by encouraging business development, facilitating tourism, improving infrastructure, and reducing costs of living.

For example, in 2015 the Law on the Development of Mountain Regions was adopted by the Georgian Parliament. This law provides tax exemptions to private businesses, increases the salary of local teachers and medical staff, and raises pensions of mountain residents. In 2018, Maia Tskitishvili, Minister of Regional Development and Infrastructure, declared the Ministry will now be taking steps to address all “the problems in the mountains not covered by this law,” as part of the 2019-2023 Strategy and Action Plan.²⁰ These steps will include a paramedics program for urgent medical needs, better internet connectivity to “contribute to the development of tourism in this region,” and a solar panel project to deliver electricity to 50 dark villages.

In 2017, the World Bank began the implementation of a US\$60 million project²¹ as part of its Third Regional Development Project (RDP III) which seeks “to improve infrastructure services and institutional capacity to support the development of a tourism-based economy of the Samtskhe-Javakheti and Mtskheta-Mtianeti regions.”²² This strategy was published in December of 2016 by the Municipal Development Fund of Georgia (MDF) under the title *The Strategic Environmental, Social and Cultural Heritage Assessment (SESHSA)* and will referred to throughout this paper as the SESHSA report.

²⁰ First Channel. “The Ministry of Regional Development will develop the Strategy and Action Plan for 2019-2023 Mountain Development.” August 22, 2018. Accessed at: <https://1tv.ge/news/mtis-ganvitarebis-2019-2023-wlebis-strategiasa-dasamoqmedo-gegmas-regionuli-ganvitarebis-saministro-sheimushavebs/>

²¹ Municipal Development Fund of Georgia (MDF). “The Strategic Environmental, Social and Cultural Heritage Assessment of the Regional Development and Tourism Development Strategies of Samtskhe-Javakheti and Mtskheta-Mtianeti.” World Bank: December 2016. Pg. 17. Available at: <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/410941481095959336/pdf/SFG2732-EA-P150696-Box396336B-PUBLIC-Disclosed-12-6-2016.pdf>

²² Ibid, pg. 17.

All of these development plans and efforts directly implicate this paper's region of interest, Khevsureti, a small region of approximately 1000km² in Mtskheta-Mtianeti region on the northern Georgian border with Chechnya. Current developments include: 1) a recently-completed mountain pass and road connecting the previously isolated Arkhoti valley to the rest of Khevsureti,²³ and 2) a road-building project which began in May 2018 and plans to run pavement from the mountain village of Juta in region of Kazbegi to the west, through Khevsureti, and to Omalo in Tusheti, the region to the east. The section connecting Juta to Roskha in Khevsureti is currently under construction and is set to be finished in February of 2019.²⁴

Whether in speeches, articles, or reports, Khevsureti is hardly mentioned without a plug for its great potential for tourism. Indeed, as its population and dairy industry have dwindled, tourism is the only thing growing in Khevsureti. During our visit in the summer of 2017, the only places showing any signs of development were Roshka, Shatili, and Mutso, all places with significant natural and cultural attractions for tourists.

With a population now of only 354,²⁵ the question of development to "benefit local populations" is becoming increasingly moot—the population almost no longer exists. During interviews in 2017, local residents quoted even lower numbers than the official statistics, a pessimistic estimation, but one which explain the houses pointed out to us to which no one had returned that spring. In winter Khevsureti is virtually emptied, we were told, except for the administrative center Barisakho, with a recorded population of 153 people.²⁶

²³ Guthrie, Samantha. *Roshka-Arkhoti Road Opens for Off-Road Vehicles*. Tbilisi: Georgia Today. July 23, 2018. Available at: <http://georgiatoday.ge/news/11458/Roshka-Arkhoti-Road-Opens-for-Off-Road-Vehicles>

²⁴ Build.gov.ge. "Projects 2017-2020." Available at: <http://build.gov.ge/en/projects?title=Roshka>

²⁵ National Statistics Office of Georgia. *The General Description of the Population of 2014*. Tbilisi: 2015. Available at: <http://census.ge/files/results/english/>

²⁶ Ibid.

Yet in spite of the low population, development of the mountainous regions of northern Georgia has important implications for both national security and the Georgian economy. With two breakaway regions occupied by Russia, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and recent incursions by Russian military in 2008, populating the northern border is a keen interest for Georgians. This is also a feature of Khevsur identity, as in our interviews Khevsurs would refer to the last few northern-most villagers as "holding down the fort."

Tourism is Georgia's fastest growing economic sector, and as highly-developed international destinations like Kazbegi and Svaneti will attest, areas of impressive cultural and natural attraction have become significant draws.

Khevsureti is heralded as a prime area of *untapped* tourism potential,²⁷ magnificent, but with roads yet unpaved and few amenities for visitors. The region now has a few small restaurants and several guesthouses, and everyone we spoke to told us that more tourists come every year. When asked about their future, all younger residents we spoke with expressed hopes for participating in the growing tourist industry.

The benefits of the tourism industry are already apparent. Georgians who moved from Khevsureti have returned to open businesses. Locals are employed as cooks, maids, drivers, and tour guides for visitors. Small shops see much more traffic. Everyone we met spoke in positive terms about the tourism industry. Although we hoped our interviews would capture the negative aspects of this sudden onslaught of tourists, when pressed, respondents found it difficult to think of criticisms. These aspects are explored in detail in Chapter 1, section 1.6.

Yet many nearly-empty villages benefit little from tourism, and efforts to support other livelihoods, such as dairy farming, are neglected. Likewise, little attention has been paid to protecting

²⁷ MDF Report. "The Strategic...." World Bank. Pg. 8.

the integrity of the cultural and natural resources in Khevsureti. For example, Shatili's towers are at great risk, locals told us, and collapse regularly.²⁸ Shatili has no protective status and locals are encouraged to *take responsibility* for their towers, a situation discussed in detail in section 2.4. While promoted as a top tourist destination, little effort has been made to create accurate historical information for visitors, or to correct inaccurate information, such as the Khevsur-crusader "hypothesis," discussed in detail in chapter 4.

To date, the only serious step taken toward protective status of a Khevsureti site was in 2007, when the Georgian government submitted a proposal to UNESCO to make Shatili a World Heritage Site. Since then, the necessary next steps have not been taken, and we learned from our meetings with Ministry officials, developing the necessary plans is not a priority. Meanwhile, Shatili has been widely cited, incorrectly, as a UNESCO site.

This chapter discusses the benefits and risks of current development projects in Khevsureti, and informs these issues with local perspectives, based on our 2017 interviews. While Khevsureti's communities will experience benefits from increased visitor traffic, long-term resilience will require land management plans that protect natural and cultural resources and provide support to agricultural livelihoods. A growing tourism industry is helping revitalize Khevsureti, but sustainable use of these resources requires management plans and steps in current development plans and reports. Finally, development strategies, if wishing to preserve Khevsur culture and retain a population in sites other than famous tourism spots, must consider Khevsureti as a discreet historical-ethnographic region facing livelihood constraints, rather than only considering Khevsureti in terms of only tourism development and popular spots.

²⁸ Agenda.ge. *Professionals restoring Shatili highland village tower after collapse*. Tbilisi: Agenda.ge, October 30, 2017. Available at: <http://agenda.ge/en/news/2017/2389>

2.1 Need for Viable Livelihoods

Throughout reports, plans, and commentary is a recognition of the need to protect Khevsureti's natural and cultural resources, to reverse out-migration, and to support local livelihoods.

Most consequential is the 2016 *Regional Development Programme of Georgia*, which describes itself as a "governmental document specifying the main goals and objectives of Georgia's Regional Development Policy and its relevant priorities and measures."²⁹ This document highlights the importance of providing "remote mountainous districts [with] viable livelihood for at least a core population," through "supporting traditional business development and introduction of new technologies."³⁰

During our interviews, we learned a main source of income for many households was employment with the border guard. These jobs were considered the best in the area. Jobs in schools or hospitals were said to receive far less compensation. Employment in the tourism industry was not yet seen as a livelihood, but rather a supplemental income. Dairy production and raising livestock to sell were the main agricultural activities for income but practiced by fewer residents every year.

2.2 Current Developments

2.2.1 The Law on the Development of Mountainous Regions

The Law on the Development of Mountainous Regions is ambitious in its rhetoric, seeking to "provide substantial social, economic, and business benefits" to local people.³¹ This law effects increases for the salaries of teachers, doctors, and pensioners, and supplements electricity and heating costs.

²⁹ Ministry of Regional Development and Infrastructure of Georgia. *Regional Development Programme of Georgia 2015-2017*. July 9, 2014 Tbilisi. Available at: <http://mrdi.gov.ge/en/news/regional-development-program-georgia-2015-2017-rdp>. Pg. 3.

³⁰ Ibid. Pg. 32-33.

³¹ UNDP. *Georgia Adopts a Law on the Development of Mountainous Regions*. July 31, 2015. Available at: <http://www.ge.undp.org/content/georgia/en/home/presscenter/pressreleases/2015/07/31/georgia-adopts-a-law-on-the-development-of-mountainous-regions-.html>

Monthly assistance for families with children is given, including 100 gel per month for each newborn.

According to the Georgia Revenue Service website, tax benefits include exemptions from income and property taxes for residents and entrepreneurs living in mountain settlements.³² This widely-praised law targets people in all mountainous regions across the northern borders, such as Svaneti, Racha, Kazbegi, Khevsureti, and Tusheti.

Yet, for Khevsureti, these benefits are experienced to a lesser degree. New enterprises, such as guesthouses and restaurants, receive a helpful boost from the law's no-tax policy and are its most visible beneficiaries. Those working in the tourism industry do not stay in Khevsureti during the winter. The guesthouses often are not built by the "core population," that is, the few residents who have always lived in Khevsureti, but by those who have made lives in the lowlands and move back part-time.

A dairy farmer we spoke with in the village of Chie explained she was not eligible for any of the benefits, as she was not considered a resident. Come every October, she and her husband herd their cows to the lowlands. Moving to the lowlands is a common pattern for Khevsurs, as its lack of infrastructure and community make living there during the winter virtually impossible. This move makes most Khevsurs ineligible for the law's benefits, unlike regions like Racha and Svaneti with better developed infrastructure and more year-round residents. It is ironic that, to benefit, the local people must already possess capacity to stay in their homes all winter.

2.2.2 Building Roads in Khevsureti

As discussed in section 1.7, the poor condition of roads is a constant theme of life and conversation in Khevsureti. A paved road is the one thing most often identified by people in Khevsureti

³² Georgia Revenue Service. "Privileges and Rights/Liabilities of High Mountain Settlement Enterprise." Accessed December 11, 2018, at: http://www.rs.ge/Default.aspx?sec_id=4723&lang=1&catid=101

as what would most improve their lives, encourage them to stay, and bring people back. Yet road building is expensive, and in terms of a population of only 354 and falling, difficult to justify.

In mountain regions, striking a balance between environmental protection and infrastructure updates is an ever-present area of great hazard and compromise. High impact projects such as hydroelectric dams, ski resorts, and road-building confer economic and social benefits, yet come at the expense of the environment. As the SESCHA report itself states, “Transport infrastructure is key for regional development, however better access to some remote areas may cause *transformation of ecosystems and landscapes* preserved from anthropogenic impacts till present.”³³

2.2.3 Arkhoti Valley Road

One such project was the construction of a long-awaited road to Arkhoti. These building plans were announced in 2014,³⁴ and the road reached the valley in 2018.³⁵

The villages of Akhieli and Amgha in Arkhoti valley are a few of the last examples of inhabited villages to which one must still travel by foot or horse. During our visits, we found the road to be the main preoccupation of the residents of Arkhoti valley. Our host in Amgha, Paata Tsiklauri, scrutinized the footage of the tractors we had taken with my phone for several minutes, before showing it to others and complaining about slow progress and suspicious construction contracts.

Few residents remain in Arkhoti to interview, but all we spoke with saw the road as a positive development. Not only would it enable the transport of materials and improve residents’ mobility, but respondents expressed hope that tourists would come, and local entrepreneurs would develop guesthouses.

³³ MDF. "The Strategic...." World Bank. Pg. 9.

³⁴ Mtisambebi.ge. "Arriving to the Villages of Arkhoti for the First Time," (Georgian). April 25, 2017. Retrieved from: <http://mtisambebi.ge/news/people/item/444-pirvelad-arxotis-soplebshi-samanqane-gzit-ivlisshi-mivalt>

³⁵ Guthrie, Roshka-Arkhoti... Georgia Today.

According to Ilia Darchiashvili, former Deputy Minister of Infrastructure, “Dozens of families are waiting for this road to be built so that they can return to their homes in the mountains. This road will be the link between the country’s northernmost area and the rest of its territory. The vicinity of our border will be repopulated, local infrastructure will develop and so will tourism. Many good things will follow the completion of this road.”³⁶

When we hiked out of the valley, and reached the top of the pass, we saw a sports utility vehicle, and hoping for a ride, asked the couple if they had room to take us down the other side. The young man driving was himself a Khevsur whose grandparents came from Arkhoti. They had driven up to see the progress of the road and were anticipating the day they would be able to drive right up to their ancestral home.

2.2.4 “Sno-Juta-Roshka-Shatili-Omalo-Khadori Valley-Batsara-Akhmeta Road Construction Project”

Another road-building project commenced in May 2018 with the goal of constructing a road through adjacent mountain regions from Kazbegi, across Khevsureti, and to Tusheti.³⁷ This project represents the most ambitious road-building project in the region to date, and in a region of only dirt roads, this road will represent the first interregional paved roadway for Khevsureti.

The official description states that, as a result of the road project, “Sno-Juta-Roshka-Shatili-Omalo-Khadori Gorge-Batsara-Akhmeta road users and especially, local population, will be able to move on a new, comfortable and safer road. Travel time and cost will be reduced. Furthermore, regional connectivity will be improved and social-economic opportunities - enhanced.”³⁸

³⁶ Lomidze, Eka. *A Dirt Road of Dreams: Road from Roshka to Arkhoti to be Laid by Khevsurians*. Tbilisi: Georgian Journal. November 5, 2015. Available at: <https://www.georgianjournal.ge/society/31746-a-dirt-road-of-dreams-road-from-roshki-to-arkhoti-to-be-laid-by-khevsurians.html>

³⁷ Build.gov.ge. “Projects 2017-2020.” Available at: <http://build.gov.ge/en/projects?title=Roshka>

³⁸ “Construction of Sno-Juta-Roshka-Shatili-Omalo-Khadori Gorge-Batsara-Akhmeta road,” Accessed December 12, 2018. Available at: <http://build.gov.ge/en/content/construction-sno-juta-roshka-shatili-omalo-khadori-gorge-batsara-akhmeta-road>

While Khevsureti residents constantly express wishes for roads, in our interviews we found they are much more ambivalent about this specific road. A paved road that ran directly to the lowlands would greatly improve their quality of life, and target many issues, such as difficulty moving agricultural and commercial products, depopulation, and access for tourists. However, residents felt that a mountain road from Kazbegi would primarily benefit tourism and not much else. Tourists would likely drive into Khevsureti from Kazbegi, a popular region with good roads to the lowlands. In this respect, the “Sno-Juta-Roshka-Shatili-Omalo-Khadori Valley-Batsara-Akhmeta Road Construction Project” does not take into account local people’s preferences nor most of their livelihood concerns. Yet, paving the existing road *up to* Khevsureti would support livelihoods in a myriad of ways, including tourism, and be more inline with the preferences of the local population.

Another concern, according to CENN, an environmental NGO, is that past road projects have proceeded with numerous violations of environmental regulations, and while citations and fines are given, construction is not halted, and fines are not enforced.³⁹ This road is an especially egregious example as it creates a new road where no dirt road exists, cutting across an undeveloped region of mountain. Paving the dirt road running down to the lowlands would not only encourage tourism, but also local agriculture and repopulation. Due to its high elevation, in winter this new road not be usable for much of the year.

2.3 Agricultural development

Historically, agriculture has been Khevsureti’s primary livelihood. Today, while most households have home gardens, income is generated by dairy production and raising cattle to, according to our interviews. Dairy products from Khevsureti include cheese, *hacho*, similar to cottage cheese, *erbo*, a kind

³⁹ CENN. *Assessment of the Recreational Potential of Georgian Forests*. Austrian Development Cooperation. 2016. Available at: http://environment.cenn.org/app/uploads/2018/01/1_CENN_Recreational-Potential-of-Georgian-Forests_ADA-SFG2_171002.pdf

of butter, and *matsoni*, a sharp, sour yoghurt. These products are sold in the lowlands, and often considered superior to lowland or imported counterparts.

Georgia's 2017 *Regional Development Programme* report recognizes that while market demand exists, "rural-based agriculture" throughout Georgia is not at present able to respond to these demands, as they are currently unable to support a sufficient population.⁴⁰ In mountainous regions this is especially true as, without a good road, transporting products to sell is difficult. The bad road conditions lead to damaged products, significantly longer transport times, and weather-dependent market access. A 2015 USAID report also points to lack of qualified veterinarians, access to medicines, and feed challenges as current constraints on Georgia dairy.⁴¹

Khevsur farmers complained that much milk spoiled, as it cannot be easily transported or processed in time. One resident pointed out that current dairy production is far below what it used to be due to outmigration and thought what the area needed was a local processing facility to buy milk, which would make it possible for the few residents left to have larger herds. Given all these livelihood constraints, the decision to create a transregional road, rather than a road from the lowlands, seems particularly neglectful.

2.4 New Tourism in Khevsureti

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Georgia has been held up as an economic success story for former Soviet states and hailed by the US Department of State as a business-friendly, well-functioning market economy.⁴² In 2015, the Georgian government, in collaboration with the World Bank, identified Georgia's tourism potential as a key development sector based on Georgia's unique

⁴⁰ Ministry of Regional Development and Infrastructure of Georgia. *Regional Development...* Pg. 28.

⁴¹ USAID. New Economic Opportunities Initiative: Final Report. December 2015. Pg. 32.

⁴² Galt & Taggart Research. *Georgia's Tourism Sector, Shifting into High Gear*. June 21, 2016. Retrieved from: galtandtaggart.com/dw/downloadReport.php?fl=343

cultural and natural heritage.⁴³ A 2016 report showed tourism growth had exceeded expectations with a 7.0% increase from 2014 to 2015, and an expected 15% increase in 2016.⁴⁴

These developments have been felt in Khevsureti. Twenty years ago, local residents informed us, visitors to Khevsureti were almost unheard of, yet now more and more tourists come every year. The experience of locals with the tourist industry is explored deeply section 1.6. No estimation of the number of visitors to Khevsureti exists, but according to the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources, the number of ecotourism visitors to Georgia increased to 518,000 in 2017, up fivefold from 2010.⁴⁵

According to the SESCHA report, plans for the development of Mtskheta-Mtianeti's untapped tourism potentials will follow the "value-chain approach." Action plans were formulated with the participation of all major stakeholders specifying that investments would target tourism services near cultural heritage attractions and include specific training programs designed for heritage site guides.⁴⁶

Without further detail, it will not be clear who will be the beneficiaries of these projects until they are announced. This is not small worry, as investment and project grants can vary widely in quality and local impact. For example, problematic instances of rural development grants might be those awarded by USAID to businesses like Aragvi Adventure Center, Mountain Travel Agency, and Kazbegi Mountain Tourism Hut. These grants aim to "enhance adventure tourism opportunities in the region,"⁴⁷ yet the recipients of these grants are based in the lowlands, near Tbilisi. Funds were awarded to purchase recreational equipment and to pay for trainings. Also, highlighted as an achievement is that the USAID initiative helped create 22 jobs to make souvenirs, which will no longer be ordered from

⁴³ World Bank. "A Tourism Strategy for Georgia – New Path Ahead." December 7, 2015. Available at: <http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2015/12/07/a-tourism-strategy-for-georgia-new-path-ahead>

⁴⁴ Galt & Taggart Research. "Georgia's Tourism Sector, Shifting into High Gear." June 21, 2016. Retrieved from: galtandtaggart.com/dw/downloadReport.php?fl=343

⁴⁵ CENN. Georgian Forests. Pg. 25.

⁴⁶ MDF Report. "The Strategic...." World Bank. Pg. 8.

⁴⁷ Ibid. Pg. 33.

China. One video shows Svaneti magnets being made, although this company is in the Dusheti municipality near Tbilisi, and nowhere near the northwestern region of Svaneti.

As the beneficiaries of these companies do not live in the mountains, and the money they make not spent there, these grants do little to support livelihoods in mountainous regions, like Khevsureti. That these companies are using the cultural and natural assets of the mountains to profit is not illicit or necessarily problematic in itself. However, this should be distinguished from “rural development grants” meant to develop resilience in mountainous regions. In so far as tourism development meant to reverse outmigration and support mountain livelihoods, a clear distinction should be made between local businesses owned by residents of mountain areas, and lowland businesses that simply operate in mountain areas.

2.4.1 Protection of Cultural Resources

To visit Khevsureti today is to go to rural communities much like those found throughout Georgia. Busses run daily. Many own cars. There are small shops, and the houses have televisions, electricity, refrigerators, and normal people with normal lives. Everyone spoke much like Georgians speak in the capital, save for a few of the oldest people. It is true, Khevsurs still recognize their ancient holidays with their traditional beer, and simplified versions of Khevsur rituals, but according to respondents, these are in a spirit of tradition, and not true representations of the old Khevsur rituals.

The long-term challenge to the development of cultural tourism, according to an OECD report, is “[creating] sustainable relationships and [avoiding] tourism damaging cultural resources.”⁴⁸ The World Bank’s 2016 SESCHA report pays lips service to this exact challenge as it lays out the development of tourism-based economies in the Mtskheta-Mtianeti region. With optimism, the report tells readers that

⁴⁸ OECD. The Impact of Culture on Tourism. 2009. Pg. 65.

"harnessing the tourism potential of this region would help to provide job opportunities particularly in mountainous areas and to support rural populations, balancing migrations to the lower plains."⁴⁹

Yet the SESCHA report warns that tourism also comes with significant risks: "As Georgia strives to establish itself as a tourist destination and concentrates on increasing inflow of visitors:

- 1) Little attention is given to carrying capacity of the advertised sites
- 2) Management plans are not required or used
- 3) Saturation will lead to negative impact on visitor's experience and harm the heritage sites.⁵⁰

It notes that natural and cultural resources are "in a need of restoration and conservation," and that past projects for restoration of historical monuments resulted in "controversial outcomes." It advises that a "cautious approach is required to the restoration works to be undertaken on the historic monuments of the Mtskheta-Mtianeti region."

Although not specified, the report likely references efforts such as the mismanaged "rehabilitation" of the roofs on the ancient Shatili towers, which locals described to us as disastrous. Here, heavy concrete was poured on the roofs to repair and protect, yet water drainage was not considered during the pouring. In addition to adding top-heavy stress on walls, water now runs freely down and deteriorates the walls' structural integrity. During our visit in July 2017, a tower had collapsed the week before.

Yet, while recognizing the importance of sustainable use of cultural resources, the strategy laid out in this document fails to detail any specific steps or measures to be integrated into development plans, such as risk-assessments and baseline studies. Also conspicuously lacking is any detail about objectives or plans outlining steps to protect cultural and natural resources.

⁴⁹ MDF Report. "The Strategic...." World Bank. Pg. 21

⁵⁰ Ibid. Pg. 11

2.4.2 The Case of Shatili

Shatili is the site of the awesome tower complex, largely responsible for putting Khevsureti on the map. Tourists did not start coming in large numbers until a few years ago, according to residents, and guesthouses have opened up all around the site to accommodate the growing number of visitors.

When Sergei Makalatia visited Khevsureti in the 1930s, no one remembered when the towers were built. He notes that guns first appeared in Georgia in the 16th century. As embrasures intended for guns are built into most of the towers, he suggests most towers date to no earlier than the 17th and 18th centuries.

The towers found throughout Khevsureti served different uses, with militaristic towers distinguished by their height and terraced-pyramid-shape roofs. Dwellings had flat roofs and as villages were often built into hills, these flat rooms served as platforms and entryways for the building directly above. Each clan had its own defensive tower and during the attacks from the neighboring people, such as Kists and Leks, the families would seek refuge there.⁵¹ Not only was there a need to ward off foreign attackers, but the towers also incorporated practical concerns of shelter and animal care, as well as matters of cultural pride and magnificence. The fortress-village of Shatili is perhaps the best example of structures intended to serve both purposes.

In the past few years, lack of protected status and mismanagement of renovation projects has left the Shatili-fortress complex in a state of disrepair. Currently, towers are vulnerable to deterioration by weather and have become dangerous. As mentioned above, annually increasing number of visitors will no doubt also put greater stress on these structures and the surrounding landscapes.

On July 28, 2017, we met with the staff of the Georgian Cultural Heritage Agency. During our interviews, the staff emphasized it was the responsibility of locals in Khevsureti to protect sites of

⁵¹ Makalatia, Sergei. *Khevsureti*. (Georgian.) 1930. Pg. 177.

cultural heritage and the local municipalities to develop the needed management plans.⁵² This hands-off approach was reiterated in a statement released in October 2017 concerning the Shatili towers, which states that the government's position is Shatili residents should take responsibility for the towers and their care.⁵³ During our interview, one staff member pointed out that Georgia is full of historical sites and monuments, and it is impossible for an agency to care for them all.

This position about Shatili is somewhat baffling. Shatili is not simply another cultural site, but a world-famous tourist destination. The MDF report itself identifies Shatili as “one of the most significant sites” in the Mtskheta-Mtianeti region. As the basis for the local economy, Shatili’s exceptional value makes it all the more relevant for sustainable development of the region. Worries about costs associated with renovation seem incongruent with a \$60,000,000 road project⁵⁴ aiming to ramp up tourism in the area. While an expectation that locals will have the know-how or resources to properly preserve this site is unrealistic, development plans are likely greatly complicated by the convoluted state of land rights for mountainous areas, discussed in section 1.4.1.

2.4.3 Shatili’s Disconcerting Association with UNESCO

For the past several years, Shatili has been touted as a potential UNESCO World Heritage Site. Popular Georgian and international travel sites bandy about its UNESCO association as part of their promotional material, as will be found in entries on Tripadvisor.com, Transfersgeorgia.com, Georgiastartshere.com, Visitgeorgia.it, to name a few. Many of these incorrectly assert that Shatili is a designated UNESCO World Heritage Site., and it is therefore important to give a detailed account of its history with UNESCO.

⁵² A video of this meeting can be seen at: <https://youtube/kKTuwGK9xcs>

⁵³ Ministry of Georgian Cultural Heritage Agency. *Rehabilitation of Shatili 6th Tower*. October 2017. Available at: https://heritagesites.ge/ka/news_item/37

⁵⁴ “Construction of Sno-Juta-Roshka-Shatili-Omalo-Khadori Gorge-Batsara-Akhmeta road,” Accessed December 12, 2018. Available at: <http://build.gov.ge/en/content/construction-sno-juta-roshka-shatili-omalo-khadori-gorge-batsara-akhmeta-road>

As of yet Shatili has failed to move from the UNESCO's official tentative list, the very first step in a long process. The proposal for UNESCO recognition was submitted in October of 2007 by the Ministry of Culture, Monuments Protection and Sport of Georgia.

Concerning the tentative list, UNESCO's site features a disclaimer stating that UNESCO does not "endorse the accuracy or reliability of any advice, opinion, statement or other information or documentation provided by the States [sic] Parties to the World Heritage Convention to the Secretariat of UNESCO or to the World Heritage Centre." In other words, inclusion on the tentative list indicates no protective status, integrity of the item, or recognition of authenticity by UNESCO. Currently, UNESCO's Tentative List includes 1,681 sites from all over the world, with submission years ranging from 1984 to present, and 405 tentative sites from the past five years alone.

The statement submitted by the Georgian State Party describes Shatili as a medieval-to-early modern fortress complex composed of terraced flat-roofed dwellings, and a chain for some 60 towers that functioned to guard the north-eastern outskirts of Georgia. It states that the authenticity of Shatili has been completely preserved in its "architectural forms, materials, location and other necessary attributes," and characterized the "physical condition of the buildings" as "good."

With a submission date of 2007, Shatili has now spent over a decade on the tentative list. While the reason for its languishing seniority have never been officially commented upon, the submission document itself suffers from worryingly scant detail and accuracy. Not only do these descriptions seem incongruent with the descriptions of locals (see section 1.6.2) but are limited to the most general descriptions of the site, such as its location, a short blurb describing its defensive and residential function, and a count of the relevant structures.

To illustrate the disconcerting brevity of the Shatili submission, I performed a superficial exercise in which I randomly selected an entry from a different country for every year since Georgia's 2008 proposal.⁵⁵ The results are listed in table 1 below:

Name of Site	Country	Year	Word Count
Shatili	Georgia	2007	256
Ancien port d'embarquement des esclaves de Loango	Congo	2008	1062
Amudarya State Nature Reserve	Turkmenistan	2009	810
La Rambla (promenade maritime) de la Cité de Montévideo	Uruguay	2010	1944
Oasis de Figuig	Morocco	2011	1977
Nîmes, l'Antiquité au présent	France	2012	2979
al Dimaniyyat Islands Nature Reserve	Oman	2013	1274
Sites funéraires et mémoriels de la Première Guerre mondiale	Belgium	2014	4057
Le Portail du Monastère de Ripoll	Spain	2015	6649
Salines de Pedra de Lume	Cabo Verde	2016	1527
La Table de Jugurtha à Kalaat-Senen	Tunisia	2017	2196

From this alone, it is painfully clear efforts to make Shatili a UNESCO World Heritage Site were lacking from the beginning.

Especially inaccurate is its depiction of the towers as “completely preserved” and the condition of buildings as “good”. As mentioned, several towers have collapsed in recent years, and a recent renovation of the roofs have caused water from the rain and snow to drain down into the walls, causing them to become unstable. While we were told some of the collapsed towers have been since rebuilt,

⁵⁵ UNESCO's tentative list can be found at: <https://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/>

this no doubt undermines their original authenticity. When we arrived in Shatili on June 3, 2017, another tower had collapsed only the week before.

The prospects for Shatili to become a UNESCO World Heritage Site are not good. Not only is the 2007 proposal skimpy and uninformed, but the acceptance of the proposal to the tentative list is only the first and easiest step in a long process. Following status as tentative site, the nomination process takes about 1.5 years according to UNESCO and requires “adequate protection and management systems to ensure a properties [sic] safeguarding.” The guidelines go on to say that “very high standards are required in this area. The Inspectorate looks closely at legal framework, designation, ownership, commitment of resources, management philosophy, effectiveness of on-the-ground measures and public access.”

Finally, the name UNESCO itself carries authority, and by having a proposal on UNESCO’s tentative list of heritage sites, one can easily misconstrue UNESCO’s level of involvement in evaluating the site, as has clearly been the case many times over with Shatili. Unfortunately, UNESCO may unintentionally undermine its own mission this way. By raising the profile of a potential site and bringing it into the eye of the tourism sector, UNESCO’s association with the site increases traffic to a sensitive area with vulnerabilities not yet addressed by management plans.

2.4.4 The Case of Mutso

Shatili marks the northmost point on Khevsureti’s main road, which takes a sharp right past Shatili. Heading southeast for about 15 kilometers, one reaches Musto, another stunning fortress-village high up on the mountain side

Mutso’s proximity to Shatili make it a useful comparison. Unlike Shatili, Mutso sat almost completely abandoned since the Soviet resettlements. Yet a large-scale rehabilitation project started in 2014 was completed in 2018. In Mutso are 30 fortified dwellings and four towers, many of them in a state of severe disrepair. Efforts were made to use traditional methods and materials in the

restorations, which reinforced stairways, balconies, and roofs, waterproofed facades, and restored oak doors. Much of the deterioration was due to the erosion of the mud caulking. With its completion, Mutso is seeing the opening of nearby guesthouses and cafes.

According to Nikoloz Antidze, the total project cost 3.7 million GEL (1.39 million USD), 1.7 million of it financed by the government, and the rest by the Kartu foundation, an extension of Kartu Bank, owned and founded by billionaire Bidzina Ivanishvili.⁵⁶ This is a positive development, but one which does not suggest wider strategy. The cost itself reveals the absurdity of the suggestion that Shatili residents should plan and finance the upkeep of their own towers. It was also straightforward, and uncomplicated by the claims or preferences of the local population.

2.4.5 The Case of Amgha

For comparison, it is helpful to look at real people in Khevsureti who are still living without the advantages of development and infrastructure. Amgha is one of three inhabited villages in Arkhoti Valley. Arkhoti Valley today is much like the popular Shatili fortress complex was 10 years ago. According to one respondent, the first tourists visited Shatili in 2004.

In Arkhoti we find livelihoods and sensibilities much less affected by development. Folk are more curious about visitors, and less urbanized than people in Shatili, many of whom have only recently returned to take advantage of the commercial opportunities offered by Shatili's popularity and accessibility.

Of the people we met in Amgha, three were teenagers, a brother and sister staying at their family's village on summer holiday and a schoolmate they'd brought along. Their parents were also

⁵⁶ Ivanishvili is not only the richest person in Georgia with diverse holdings in Russia, but also is founder the Georgian Dream coalition, Georgia's current ruling party. He served as the Prime Minister for little more than a year, before handing off the office to his long-time personal assistant, Irakli Garibashvili in 2013.

there, as well as a single middle-aged man name Zezva who had recently decided to return semi-permanently, and finally the grandmother, Sandua Tsiklauri.

Walking around Amgha left little doubt that it once was an active community: the village was a maze of stone fences lead to overgrown yards and rows of collapsing two-story stone houses. Short walls surrounding deep pits of undergrowth mark many long-ago abandoned residences. Yet, we also came upon a healthy garden of tobacco plants, and another large patch of tarragon, as well as a yard full of beehives. Below the village are several large corrals that fill at night with a sizable herd of 35 cows. A large barn in good condition houses timber, a generator, a modern gas-run cultivator, and other supplies.

While we ate, we could hear the rest of the family watching television in the next room. The electricity was thanks, they said, to Zviad Gamsakhurdia, the first president of the newly independent Georgia. During his short, disastrous presidency, he had managed to follow through on his promise to plug in remote mountain villages. Zviad was an outspoken activist during Soviet Times, and son of a famous writer. He was elected with an overwhelming majority, and was then immediately faced with ethnic conflicts, powerful enemies, and a turbulent economy. His brief time in office ended with a coup, followed soon after by his suspicious death in 1993. Yet, it was because of him that a small hydropower station can be found in the nearby village of Akhieli, with power lines running a few miles down river to Amgha.

In Akhieli, the Arkhoti village where we had stayed the night before, our host Khatuna had told us more foreigners were showing up in the valley every year. The new road, she hoped, would increase the number of visitors, and she was planning on opening up her home to more guests. It was clearly foreigners she expected, not Georgians. The presence of our friend Levan always slightly complicated transactions with hosts. What was he doing? Was he Khevsur? Was he a guide? Certainly, a Georgian traveling alone would not be treated as a tourist, nor given tourist prices. Upon meeting Khatuna and

noting her uncertainty, we quickly named the going rate for two. "Yes, that is about what tourists would usually pay," she commented. Levan told me later they would have accepted any price from us and considered it unthinkable to send us away.

Amgha by contrast is one of the few inhabited villages to which one must still travel by foot or horse. Here we found only one family left, down from the 25 families remembered the grandmother, Sandua Tsiklauri. She told us her father had spoken of a time when Amgha was even more vibrant. Forty-five families were said to have lived in Amgha once, cooperating closely with the other villages of Arkhoti. They gathered together for festivals, and united in solidarity against occasional quarrels with the Kists, a Chechen ethnic group to the north. For the past few winters, Amgha has been a village of one. Only Sandua's son Paata has stayed on to endure the winters alone so that he is able to take care of the cows.

Levan and I left Amgha and the Arkhoti Valley later than we meant to, around noon the following day, after our belated interview. Incredibly, we were able to hike out and make it all the way back to Tbilisi by nightfall, as if foreshadowing Arkhoti's near future. The day before, Sandua had disappeared soon after we arrived, and our requests as to her whereabouts and her willingness to be interviewed were met with shrugs. "She's old. She'll come out if she wants to," Paata replied. We were therefore very happy the next morning when she sat down on the stone bench running the length of her house and acquiesced to an interview

The interview ended abruptly after about an hour of conversation with appearance of two borders guards. The guards were in fact Sandua's other sons, employed as are many Khevsurs at posts along the Russian border. Any patience for our agenda quickly dissipated. We said thank you and went on our way. By evening we reached the pass, the terminal point of the road under construction. After being told by the construction workers we would have to walk the rest of the way to the next village, a young man with his wife pulled up. He was in fact a Khevsur, his family originally from Arkhoti valley. He

had driven all the way up, was anticipating a road that would reconnect him with his family's village. Levan requested a ride, a request he happily granted.

2.5 Conclusion

Cultural heritage is the most universally valued and most evenly distributed resource in the world. However, it is also both fragile and finite. To the task of preserving the sites of our heritage we must bring the best and most appropriate tools available.
—UNESCO

Today, most Khevsurs do not live in Khevsureti at all. Throughout the 20th century and into the 21st, they moved to other parts of Georgia—sometimes encouraged or forced by the Soviet government, but often simply because life is difficult in the mountains. While tourism and development may revitalize Khevsureti and improve livelihoods, these changes come with their own set of risks and responsibilities. Without proper steps, misrepresentation and mismanagement will continue to erode cultural heritage and the cultural and natural resources of Khevsureti.

Major speeches, reports and projects, such as World Bank's SESCHA report, focus only on tourism's potential and do not seriously consider development of local agriculture. Efforts to develop dairy and livestock value-chains in Khevsureti would benefit households wishing to maintain or initiate farm-based livelihoods and that are unlikely to be directly involved in the tourism industry. So too would efforts to alleviate constraints to smallholder farming such as those identified in the aforementioned 2015 USAID report—access to veterinarians, medicines, and high-quality feed. While the much-praised mountain law has been a success in Georgia, it leaves out most Khevsureti locals who are unable to stay in Khevsureti during the winter.

A new road currently being built to connect Khevsureti to the neighboring region Kazbegi will bring in more tourism. However, the priority articulated by many Khevsureti residents is a road connecting Khevsureti to the lowlands. Such a road would also bring in tourism, yet their interest in such a road has less to do with tourism development, but much to do with livelihood enhancement as it

would reduce transportation costs and travel times and allow local people to stay in Khevsureti longer into the winter season.

A glaring example of mismanagement is Shatili's inclusion on UNESCO's tentative list of World Heritage sites. The next steps in this process have been neglected by the state for ten years, and while this has raised Shatili's profile on the international tourism market, the increase in Georgian and international tourists has commenced without essential steps for protecting cultural heritage and related physical assets.

Steps to protect the cultural and natural resources of Khevsureti should be included in major development plans, such as the World Bank-funded Third Regional Development project outlined in the SESCHA report. These reports recognize risks but make no mention of solutions or mitigation. In addition to assessing tourism potentials, risk reports at the prominent sites of cultural heritage should be included. To foster respect and interest in Khevsurs' unique culture, the government tourism agency should also publish detailed historical information in English, Russian and other languages, and also correct misconceptions and fictions, such as the pervasive Crusader fiction.

Khevsureti's communities may experience short-term benefits from increased tourism, however, long term resilience will require land management plans that prioritize sustainable use of resources. Cultural heritage is one the most fragile and valuable resources in the world. In the complex case of the Khevsureti, competing, unreconciled visions of development cloud the very survival of a rich, irreplaceable cultural heritage.

Chapter 3: The Caucasus as Seen by Outsiders in History, Anthropology, Linguistics, Literature, Popular Culture and Scholarship

A wild imagination lies in ambush in the empty silence—with this turn of phrase Alexander Pushkin introduces the mountainous setting of his celebrated poem, *Prisoner of the Caucasus*. This poem was published in 1822 and heralded by critics and the public as a great masterpiece. According to scholar Susan Layton it was at this moment that the territory of the Caucasus became “securely fixed” on the Russian readership’s “cultural horizon.”⁵⁷ This fixture was there to stay, and as if waiting for Pushkin’s signal, Russia itself was soon ambushed by a new wave of novels, poems, and newspaper columns of imaginative tale telling, romance, and reporting about an exotic Caucuses.⁵⁸

Most familiar to Western audiences is perhaps *A Hero of Our Time* (1840) by Mikhail Lermontov. Here we are ambushed by the erratic and zealous tribesman Kazbich as he kidnaps and murders Lermontov’s highlander heroine, the beautiful Bela. Less read is Tolstoy’s 1912 posthumously-published novella *Hadjı Murat*, in which a hardened but noble Circassian warrior is caught up in a disastrous Russian campaign to tame the famous Chechen freedom fighter *Shamil*. The novella *Ammalat-Bek* (1832) from a Decembrist-in-exile Alexander Bestuzhev writing under the name Marlinsky, follows of the skirmishes of the celebrated Russian General Aleksii Yermolov from the perspective of Ammalat-Bek, a Dagestani military-political figure. Pushkin’s original *Prisoner of the Caucasus* (1822) tells of a disenchanted Russian serviceman who finds himself captured by the brave Circassians, only to be awakened by the passion of a young and ill-fated woman who tends to him in secret.

⁵⁷ Layton, Susan. *Russian Literature and Empire*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994. Pg. 5

⁵⁸ Hokanson, Katya. “The Geography of Russian Romantic Prose,” in *The Oxford Handbook of European Romanticism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016. Pg. 534-553.

These are the most famous fictional stories set in the historical context of Russia's 19th century military penetration into the Caucasus, featuring local highlanders, portrayed as fierce, freedom-loving, fighters and dark-eyed passionate beauties.

Tolstoy's *Hadjı Murat* was published 80 years after Pushkin's poem, but it was only 55 more years until Russian-Soviet cinema revamped the prisoner of the Caucasus trope for the misadventures of a popular trio of jackasses in *Kidnapping, Caucasian Style* (1967),⁵⁹ a much-loved film to this day.

The Georgian-Soviet film industry also flourished in the 1960s, often using the mountain towers and fortresses of Khevsureti as movie sets following the Soviet Resettlements of the mountain people. Popular Georgian mountain films include *Khevisberi Gocha* (1960), *The Khevsur Ballad* (1965), *Meeting in the Mountains* (1966) and most famously, *The Plea* (1967).

But Russian romantics and Soviet filmmakers were latecomers to the theme of the Caucasus. West of the Caucasus, across the Black Sea, eastward gazers have long made out an enigmatic mountainous country. Here is setting for the Greek myths of Jason, Medea, and Prometheus. Here was the other side of the great biblical landmark, the landing place of Noah's ark Mount Ararat. And here was a place for stories of the origin for the languages and races of humankind. All these are discussed in detail below.

Recent western scholarship, exploring the representations of Caucuses in literature, have drawn heavily from Edward Said's seminal work *Orientalism* (1978) in an effort to make common cause with Said's thesis of the modes of Western power in the context of colonial hegemony. Depictions of the Caucuses in literature and film are often scanned for "Oriental tells" to offer as evidence of exploitative modes of discourse. The tells include the feminization of inhabitants, idyllic depictions of landscape, noble savages and alluring beauties, etc.

⁵⁹ Itself seemingly based on a now partially lost 1930 Hollywood film *The Rogue Song*. (See: *The Rogue Song* at <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0021307/>.)

This however is not the approach of *Orientalism*. The focus of Palestine-born Said was how inaccurate depictions of the Middle East will often play into the hands of the subjugating forces of imperialism. Far less appreciated is his simple and obvious observation that an inaccurate depiction is not always a tool of power manifest in discourse. Said noted that in all representation involves a slanting, a reinterpretation, and a distortion, and he did not find this tendency *in itself* so toxic as many of his imitators, as he goes on to say, “There is nothing especially controversial or reprehensible about such domestications of the exotic; they take place between all cultures, certainly, and between all men.”⁶⁰ We should recognize this sometimes problematic application of *Orientalism* to analyze the relationship of the Caucuses with Russia is itself a misrepresentation of the Caucasus, and is discussed in detail below.

This chapter is about how the Caucasus have been written about by outsiders. It argues these representations do not suffer from a common systematic defect or underlying cause, but range widely in quality and nature. These misrepresentations fall broadly into the following categories:

- 1) The Caucasus as the origin spot of humankind
- 2) The Caucasus as an Asian-European hybrid land
- 3) The Caucasus as a folky, idyllic diminutive of Russia
- 4) The Caucasus as a foil for geopolitics involving Russia
- 5) Modern scholarship that seeks to cast the Russia/Caucasus relationship in the Occident/Orient dichotomy as explored by Edward Said

3.1 Caucasian Origin Stories in Early Anthropology, Linguistics, and Greek Mythology

⁶⁰ Said, Edward W. *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*. London. Penguin Classics, 2003. Pg. 60.

The countries of the Caucasus

contain some of the world's oldest written languages, literary canons, and well-chronicled histories,⁶¹ yet these traditions remain obscure to the rest of the world.

Instead, familiar to the Western ear will be early references in ancient Greek mythology to the mountainous land across the sea. Here we find the hero Jason, with his band of Argonauts, landing on shores of Colchis to venture into the Caucasus and reclaim the golden fleece and thereby earn the throne of Thessaly. In the Myth of Prometheus, its eponymous titan is punished by Zeus for stealing fire from the gods to give to humans, thus making human civilization possible. For this crime, Prometheus is bound to a rock in the Caucasus where an eagle would rip out his liver, which would regenerate itself only to be replucked the following morning (see figure 1).

Ambiguity about the West's relationship with the Caucasus appears even in these earliest cases. For example, a much-underappreciated detail about the Prometheus myth is its own dubious Greekness. Predating the Greeks is the strikingly similar hero Amirani, a figure found throughout the mythologies of the Caucasian peoples.

In the most common version of the myth, Amirani defies God and delivers to humans the secret of metal, an offense for which he is chained in the Caucasus and his liver eaten by his own dog for

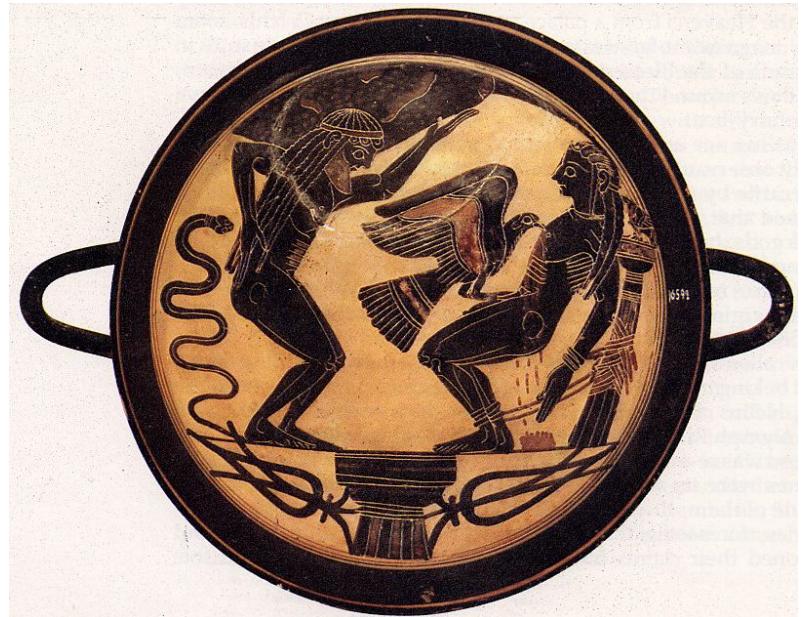


Figure 1. One of the earliest known depictions of Prometheus on a black-figure Lakonian kylix. Here the two titans, Atlas and Prometheus are pictured enduring their punishments. (Gregoriano Etrusco Museum, Vatican. c. 570-560 BCE. Retrieved from <https://www.ancient.eu/image/1149/>).

⁶¹ For an overview, see Britannica Encyclopedia entries on Armenian Literature (<https://www.britannica.com/art/Armenian-literature>) and Georgian Literature (<https://www.britannica.com/art/Georgian-literature>)

eternity. Dodona Kiziria, in a wonderfully thorough and compact essay entitled *Amirani, A Georgian Folk Hero*, says no fewer than 68 versions of the myth have been identified in historical, folkloric, and archeological sources from various regions throughout the Caucasus.⁶² The debate about which myth appeared first has its own century-spanning history. According to Kiziria, archeological evidence confirms the Amirani myth was “known amongst the ancient Georgian tribes before the eighth century B.C.” predating the earliest Greek mention of the myth in Hesiod’s *Theogony* (c. 700 BC).⁶³

Whatever its age, in this myth we find an uncanny precursor to the European racial origin stories to which we owe the confusing category of *Caucasian*. This category was introduced to the world by the pseudo-science of Johann Friedrich Blumenbach in his 1795 essay “On the Natural Varieties of Mankind.”⁶⁴

This well-received publication asserted that it was possible, by a



Figure 2. Skull of Georgian woman from Blumenbach’s On the Natural Varieties of Mankind, 1795

⁶² Kiziria, Dodona. "Amirani, a Georgian Folk Hero." Indiana University, Department of Folklore and Ethnomusicology. 1974. Pg. 131-136.

⁶³ The passage in Hesiod’s *Theogony* reads: "Ready-witted Prometheus he [Zeus] bound with inextricable bonds, cruel chains, and drove a shaft through his middle, and set on him a long-winged eagle, which used to eat his immortal liver; but by night the liver grew as much again every day as the long-winged bird devoured in the whole day. That bird Herakles (Heracles), the valiant son of shapely-ankled Alcmene (Alcmena), slew; and delivered the son of Iapetus from the cruel plague, and released him from his affliction--not without the will of Olympian Zeus who reigns on high, that the glory of Herakles the Theban-born might be yet greater than it was before over the plenteous earth" (translated by Hugh G. Evelyn-White).

⁶⁴ Blumenbach, J. F. (1865). Anthropological treatises of Johann Friedrich Blumenbach. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.5962/bhl.title.50868>

comparison of skull shapes, to trace the origin of humankind to that “most beautiful race of men” with “the most beautiful form of the skull,” found on the southern slopes of the Caucasus (see figure 2).⁶⁵

As early as the 7th century BC, the ancient Greeks considered the Caucasian god himself the creator of humankind, a race he formed out of clay, gave life to, and for the sake of which he eventually sacrificed himself.⁶⁶ The creator of humans was therefore the same god banished the Caucuses, and also the same god that preexisted the Greek version under the name Amirani among the people of the Caucasus.

This coincidental overlap with Blumenbach’s speculations suggests little of historical interest, but is one of many examples discussed that illustrate an observation by Edward Said: when studying history we “see the human ground (the foul-rag-and-bone shop of the heart, Yeats called it) in which texts, visions, methods, and disciplines begin, grow, thrive, and degenerate.”⁶⁷ Although superficially unrelated, Said points out these fields of study tend to sync up in a kind of underlying tapestry of tautology, helping to both generate and confirm each other.

⁶⁵ As if in anticipation of critics advocating an African origin theory of humans, Blumenbach explains to his reader that white skin may be assumed to be the human’s original color, as “it is very easy for [whiteness] to degenerate into brown, but very much more difficult for dark to become white.”

⁶⁶ The oldest mention is attributed to the poetess Sappho (c. 630 BCE), itself referenced by Servius in his commentary on Virgil’s Eclogues around 300 AD, where he writes, “After he had created man, is said to have ascended with Minerva’s help into heaven, and there lighting a torch at the wheel of the Sun, to have stolen fire and revealed it to man. Angered at the theft, the Gods sent two ills upon earth, fever and disease, as we are told by Sappho and Hesiod.” (see LYRA GRAECA Vol. 1, ed. J.M. Edmonds. fragment 170.) For a thorough list of Greek myths mentioning the creator of humankind myth of Prometheus, see Marty James John Šulek’s 2011 *Gifts of Fire* pg. 78.

⁶⁷ Said, *Orientalism*. Pg. 110.

Early giants of the field of linguistics fore example, such as Welshman Willian Jones (1746-1794) and the Danish Rasmus Rask (1787-1832), adopted the label *Japhetic* to designate what today would be called Proto-Indo-European, the common source-language which tongues as divergent as Russian, Sanskrit, and the Romance Languages share.

This term, *Japhetic*, is simply an adjectival form of the Biblical character Japheth, the *blessed* son of Noah (Genesis 9:27), from whom the European people were long supposed to have descended.⁶⁸

Blumenbach's conjecture that white skin degenerated into brown would have rung true to a Medieval scholar, as it was accepted wisdom at the time that Japheth's far less favored brother Ham had wandered South with his cursed son

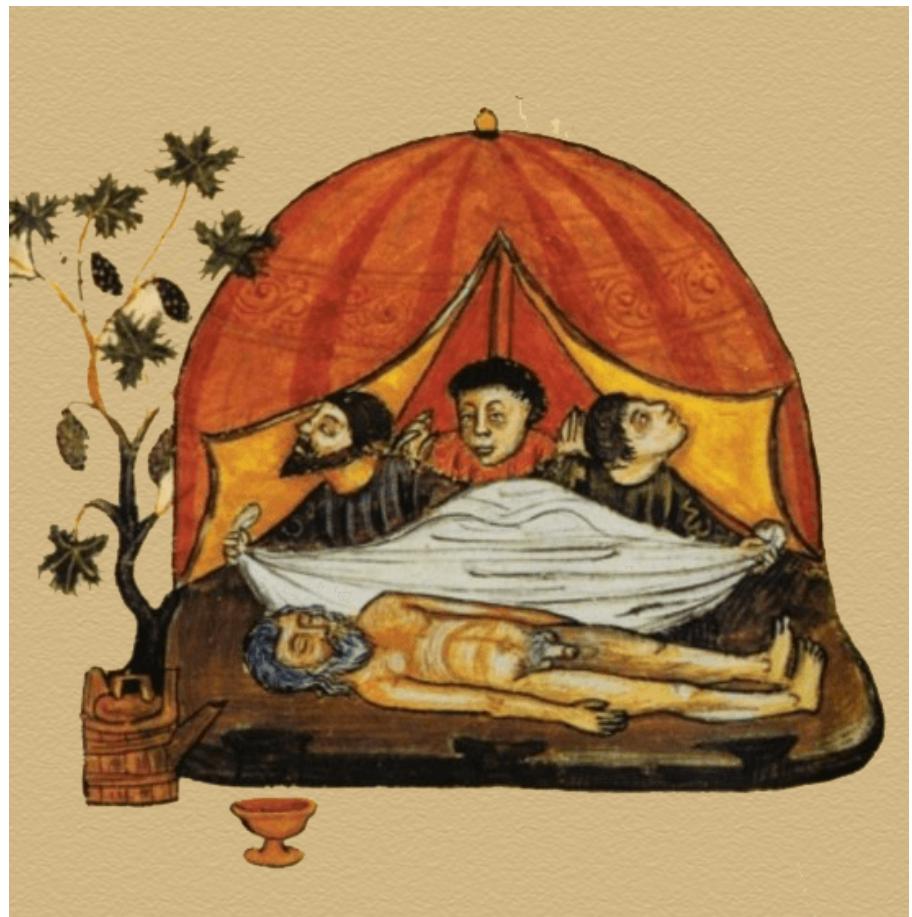


Figure 3. This image is from folio 33r of the Alba Bible, a 1430 AD illustrated Castilian translation from Hebrew Bible with theological commentary. This image depicts the story told in Genesis 9, in which Ham "looks at his father's nakedness," while Noah's other two sons, Shem and Japheth, avert their gazes as they cover their father. Tradition held that Ham and his children moved southward from Ararat to people Egypt and Ethiopia. He is depicted here as a black African.

⁶⁸ Saint Isidore of Seville (c. 560-636 AD) espoused an influential scheme of migration and ancestry based on Biblical genealogies of Noah. His writings describe descent from Biblical genealogies of all ancient and contemporaneous peoples. See Susan Reynolds piece "Medieval "Origines Gentium" and the Community of the Realm." History 68, no. 224, 1983. 375-90.

to become the father of Africans,⁶⁹ a supposition that persisted through the Renaissance (see figure 3) and into the modern era.⁷⁰

The traditional resting place of Noah's Ark is Mount Ararat, found just south of the lower Caucuses on the border of Armenia, Iran, and Turkey. Jones believed Persia to be the location of the original language and the cradle of humanity, and is said to have identified the nearby Caucasus as part of this primordial motherland.⁷¹ Anticipating this notion of a *Caucasian motherland* by 100 years was Andreas Jäger (1660–1730), a Swedish-born pastor of a German parish, whom linguist George J. Metcalf (1908–1994) quotes as having said:

An ancient language, once spoken in the distant past in the area of the Caucasus mountains and spreading by waves of migration throughout Europe and Asia, had itself ceased to be spoken and had left no linguistic monuments behind, but had as a "mother" generated a host of "daughter languages," many of which in turn had become "mothers" to further "daughters".⁷²

Although not widely recognized as the originator of the Caucasus language origin theory, Jäger's notions were mentioned many times throughout the history of linguistic discipline in Europe, according to Metcalf,⁷³ and finally found their full expression in the major writings of Jones and Rask. These linguistic suppositions fell in nicely with the Biblically-informed human migration theories, and the racial speculations of early anthropology.

These scholars should not be judged on the merits of their Caucasian fixation alone, and much of their work has stood the test of time. Jones for example was among the first Western scholars to

⁶⁹ This view was widely held by early Judaic, Islamic, and Christian scholars. See: *The Curse of Ham: Race and Slavery in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* by David Goldenberg.

⁷⁰ According to John Thomas Painter's 1880 book *Ethnology; or the History & Genealogy of the Human Race*, it was Japheth's eldest son Gomer that became father of many "races of Europeans," such as the Germans, French, and Italians, as well as Asians, such as the Chinese, Laos and, Tartars (pg. 80). Other sons settled the areas that are now Armenia and Azerbaijan (pg. 64), and his son Magog moved northward toward the Greater Caucasus to begin the races of the Circassians and Georgians (pg. 58). London, Bailliére, Tindall & Cox, 1880.

⁷¹ Robinson, Michael F. *The Lost White Tribe: Explorers, Scientists, and the Theory That Changed a Continent*. New York. Oxford University Press, 2016. Pg. 80.

⁷² Metcalf, George. *On Language Diversity and Relationship from Bibliander to Adelung*. Amsterdam. John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2013. Pg. 33.

⁷³ Ibid., 34.

realize Sanskrit was related to the Indo-European languages. Blumenbach was the first to distinguish and describe several species of primate. Jäger's intuition about a proto-mother language was astonishingly prescient, and today Rask is revered as the father of the field comparative linguistics.

In lieu of these mistakes and misrepresentations, we should notice scientists have since found much more fascinating material to put in its place. Near the village of Dmanisi in Georgia for example, scientists found the earliest examples of *Homo erectus* outside of Africa, dating 1.8 million years.⁷⁴ The first cultivation event of a grapevine (*Vitis vinifera*)⁷⁵ and earliest examples of wine-making⁷⁶ likewise are believed to have their home in the lesser Caucasus region encompassing Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan. Finally, not yet incorporated into the canons of great world literature are these countries' rich, millennium-spanning histories and literary traditions.

3.2 Popular Depictions of the Caucasus in Modern Western Culture

For Edward Said, it was out of swaths of alien Middle-Easterners that the West reliably reimagined the cultures and peoples of their imperial objects into more agreeable forms. In this way Westerners were able to make *Otherness* less unsettling, and turn it into something known, superficial, and derivative.⁷⁷

But in the Caucasus, Western observers saw something different: a hybrid place and people, both alien and recognizable. Here were Christian nations, more or less, folk with white enough skin, and a history reminiscent of the castles and tutelages of feudal Europe

⁷⁴ Lordkipanidze, D., Jashashvili, T., Vekua, A., Ponce, M. S., Zollikofer, C. P. E., Rightmire, G. P., . . . Kiladze, G. Postcranial Evidence from Early Homo from Dmanisi, Georgia. *Nature*, 449, 2007. Pg. 305-10.

⁷⁵ Terral, J.-F., Tabard, E., Bouby, L., Ivorra, S., Pastor, T., Figueiral, , . . . "Evolution and History of Grapevine (*Vitis vinifera*) Under Domestication: New Morphometric Perspectives to Understand Seed Domestication Syndrome and Reveal Origins of Ancient European Cultivars." *Annals of Botany*, 105, 2010. Pg. 443–455.

⁷⁶ McGovern, P., Jalabadze, M., Batiuk, S., Callahan, M., Smith, K., Hall, G., . . . Lordkipanidze, D. . . "Early Neolithic Wine of Georgia in the South Caucasus." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, 2017.

⁷⁷ Said, Edward. Orientalism, Pg. 21.

These were a strange but familiar people. They spoke unusual languages. They had been affected by long isolation and interaction with Asians. Their mountains were filled with tribes of belligerent warriors. It is as if, out there among the Ottomans and Turks, tucked behind the mountains, the Europeans thought they heard the beckoning of a lost half-brother, caught up in a geographical eddy. Whereas modern treatments of Middle Easterners might be exotic and effeminate, modern treatments of the Caucasus tend to characterize it as silly, fanciful, and folky, and as place of danger and adventure.

In French, most famously are the efforts of Alexandre Dumas, who toured Russia and the Caucasus for the better part of 1858 and first published his travel writings in the magazine *Le Monte-Cristo*. These writings were transcribed into two books, originally titled *Paris to Astrakhan* and *Journey to the Caucasus*.

Dumas's contrasting treatment of Russia and the Caucasus could not be more conspicuous. The former book finds the author methodically making his way through Russia, the people and culture written in careful thick description, with great lengths taken to capture historical contexts and social detail. By the latter volume, the Caucasus have been reached, and the trip turns into a breathless adventure, with our hero catapulting from stop to stop, navigating and overcoming obstacles on the way.⁷⁸

In 1948, the famous German playwright Bertolt Brecht published his popular play *Der kaukasische Kreidekreis (The Caucasian Chalk Circle)*. *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* is set in the hillsides of rural Georgia in the Soviet Union, shortly after an (ahistorical) Nazi retreat from the area. In all, the play is wonderful, folky, parable-like story in a vaguely defined alternative history.

⁷⁸ Clayton, J Douglas. "Dumas in Russia and the Caucasus: The Myth and Its Contemporary Echoes." *Other Voices: Three Centuries of Cultural Dialogue Between Russia and Western Europe*. Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011. Pg. 19.

In this story the Caucasus are a convenient screen onto which the themes of Europe could be safely projected. For Brecht, a Marxist German, Georgia acts as a whimsical postwar Soviet puppet theatre in which to explore collectivist values, as the threat of the Nazi forces retreat in the distance. It is both familiar and peripheral, and so offers a perfect proxy. In other words, Brecht's use of Georgia has nothing to do with Georgia, but everything to do with Europe.

In the same year that Brecht published this play, John Steinbeck made a notorious trip to Russia, Ukraine, and Georgia with famous war photographer Robert Capa. Their photographs and experiences are collected in the book *A Russian Journal* (1951). This book recounts a two-month trip to the Soviet Union, when the good vibes of the Allied post-World War II euphoria had not yet subsided and ideological deadlock was not yet absolute. The two Americans define their mission as to remain ideologically impartial and capture the attitudes and situations of the real people of the Soviet Union, which they find to be warm, hardworking, and resolute amidst the horrible conditions of postwar devastation.

Yet, just as in the light depictions of Dumas and Brecht, Steinbeck's stopover in Georgia is hardly more than a comical detour. The Georgians are "almost gypsy-looking, with shining teeth, and long well-formed noses, and black curly hair." Their eyes sparkle, the men flash mustaches, and the fertile country overflows with fruits and wine. The Russians, the reader is told, see Georgia as "magical" country, like a sort of "second heaven," and no attempt is made by the authors to portray it as anything else.⁷⁹

This silliness climaxes when (journalistic compunction thrown to the wind) the authors freely parrot a fanciful fable that Georgians are "an ancient Semitic people,^[80] a people which had come originally from the Euphrates Valley, at a time before Babylon was a city; that they are Sumerians, and

⁷⁹ Steinbeck, John. *A Russian Journal*. London: Penguin Classics, 2001. Pg. 201.

⁸⁰ Instead of the popular "Japhetic" Caucasian theories of Europe, Steinbeck was apparently told by either Georgians or Russian escorts that Georgians are a Semitic race, the racial term deriving from the name of Noah's son Shem and used to refer to Jews, Arabs, and Assyrians, among others.

that their strain is one of the oldest remaining in the world.”⁸¹ Here it is again—a magical, pastoral country, mixed up in the origin stories of Western traditions. Here again the Caucasian country is a foil for Russia: charming, folky, fun, and basically derivative.⁸²

The 21st century has seen Georgia in particular primarily as a mirror for geopolitical frictions, often with America acting as paternal figure. As recently as 2017, we see a carefully staged photograph of John McCain in South Ossetia reaching over a barbed-wire fence with a democratic concern and a care package.⁸³

In popular culture, perhaps the most vulgar is 2011 action flick *5 Days of War*, ostensibly a politically-minded dramatization of the 2008 Georgian-Russian conflict, but actually a heavy-handed action movie with virtually no analysis.⁸⁴ In *The West Wing* (1999 to 2006), one of the most critically acclaimed and popular television dramas of our time, a 2015 episode⁸⁵ features a clownish bureaucrat from The Republic of Georgia who shows up in the White House with a briefcase stuffed with sensitive documents cuffed to his right arm. a buffoonish and obsequious bureaucrat to a paternal United States.

3.3 Edward Said Would Likely Resist Applications of *Orientalism* to the Caucasus

Russia and the Caucasus have a far more complicated and lengthy relationship than do the English and French with their imperial exploits which Edward Said took as his main subject—these two sets of “cultural forms and structures of feeling” are simply very different. This point was not at all lost on Said, who said in his 1993 book *Culture and Imperialism*:

⁸¹ Steinbeck, John. *A Russian Journal*. Pg. 203

⁸² For less famous travelogues, Caucasus scholar George Hewitt has compiled a list on his website under the title “Western Travelers to the Caucasus” at <http://georgehewitt.net/articles/caucasus/275-western-travellers-to-the-caucasus>. (Accessed June 20, 2018).

⁸³ Cathcark, Will. “McCain & Co.’s Magical Mystery Tour of Russia’s Front Line.” The Daily Beast. Published January 3, 2017. Available at: <https://www.thedailybeast.com/mccain-and-cos-magical-mystery-tour-of-russias-front-line>

⁸⁴ In the words of Roger Ebert: “It’s a lot of tough guys running around blowing up stuff real good, and getting so many good peeks at crucial action that we wonder why neither the Georgians or the Russians can see people hiding behind a fence where even we can see them.” August 31, 2011. Available at: <https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/5-days-of-war-2011> (Accessed June 18, 2018).

⁸⁵ “Liftoff,” *The West Wing*. Season 6, episode 4. First aired November 10, 2004.

Russia, however, acquired its imperial territories almost exclusively by adjacence. Unlike Britain or France, which jumped thousands of miles beyond their own borders to other continents, Russia moved to swallow whatever land or peoples stood next to its borders, which in the process kept moving farther and farther east and south. But in the English and French cases, the sheer distance of attractive territories summoned the projection of far-flung interests, and that is my focus here, partly because I am interested in examining the set of cultural forms and structures of feeling which it produces, and partly because overseas domination is the world I grew up in and still live in. Russia's and America's joint superpower status, enjoyed for a little less than half a century, derives from quite different histories and from different imperial trajectories.⁸⁶

Throughout *Orientalism* it is precisely the short timeframe and sheer distances involved, with the imaginative forms conjured to fill that space, that so clearly illustrate Said's thesis. By comparison, Russia's literature about the Caucasus is voluminous and their two histories intertwined. This relationship simply doesn't fit well into East/West or Europe/Asia dichotomies.

Yet much effort has been made to recast the Russia-Caucuses relationship into the now familiar East/West opposition described by Edward Said in *Orientalism*. For such an analysis, the familiar signs of Orientalism are found to be so obvious that the Saidian analysis practically writes itself. First is Russia's habit of simultaneously idealizing Caucasus highlander culture, while being destructive and exploitative. Second, these idealizations are full of simplistic stereotypes, such as freedom-loving noble savages and captivating beauties. Third is the imperialist actions of both Czarist and Soviet governments in the area.

Much less discussed are the many points that do not fit in well with an Orientalism paradigm. For example, in the 18th Century, it is the Georgian monarchy who reluctantly requests Russia's tutelage, in hopes of saving Georgia from the incessant Persian and Ottoman invasions from the south that took Georgia to the brink of dissolution.⁸⁷ While much is made of the hopes of the imperial-minded Alexander Griboyedov (1795-1829) to build a trade route through the Caucasus (reminiscent of the extractive imperialists of the West), in actuality nothing ever came of these or other commercially-minded plans. Instead, almost all of Russia's oppressive activities here, such as under the commands of

⁸⁶ Said, Edward. *Culture and Imperialism*. New York: Vintage Books, 1993. Pg. 10.

⁸⁷ King, Charles. *The Ghost of Freedom: A History of the Caucasus*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008. Pg. 27.

Aleksey Petrovich Yermolov (1816–1827), Mikhail Semyonovich Vorontsov (1844–1853), and Aleksandr Baryatinskiy (1853–1856) are best characterized as misguided, often genocidal, border control. This is what Tolstoy and Lermontov took as their subject, and it as horrible, if not worse, than what Said describes in *Orientalism*. But its relationship with the discourse of literature and politics is simply different.

While it is true Russian depictions of the Caucasus often contain feminizations of nature and romantic depictions of the highlanders, at other times they contain much nuance, can be sensitive to diversity, have lengthy historical context, and are simply nearer and more familiar with their subject than the imperialists described so well by Said.

Often it is the academic critiques describing the Orientalism of Russia that themselves bear Orientalist features, such as unfamiliarity with and the dismissing of the “non-canonical scholarship” of Russia or the Caucasus countries.⁸⁸ Another is an over-simplification the Caucasian peoples, lumping highlanders, such as Circassians, Ingush, Kists, Ossetians, and Chechens with Georgians and beyond, and treating the entire area as if the Caucasus are the same place, failing to note the Caucasus contains two ranges with swaths of flatlands and seashores, themselves containing the histories of entire civilizations. To be sure, all these are mistake a Russian scholar is to likely to make.

For Said, literature itself had a key role to play in the creation and validation of colonial-minded imperialism.⁸⁹ Can the same be said for the Russian writers? Take for example the most famous depictions of the Caucasus from Russian literature, already mentioned: Alexander Pushkin’s *The Prisoner of the Caucasus*, Leo Tolstoy’s *Hadji Murat*, Marlinsky’s *Ammalat-Bek*, and Mikhail Lermontov’s *A Hero of our Time*. In all these, the Caucasus people are portrayed as fierce, freedom-loving, and dangerous,

⁸⁸ Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. Pg. 99, 323.

⁸⁹ “I attempt to elucidate subsequent developments in academic as well as literary Orientalism that bear on the connection between British and French Orientalism on the one hand and the rise of an explicitly colonial-minded imperialism on the other.” Ibid. Pg. 18/

but all of them (with the possible exception of Pushkin, discussed below) express strong anti-imperialist sentiments. In the words of scholar Susan Layton, for these authors the “revulsion from the extermination of the admirable Caucasian mountaineers deflated a central myth of imperialism—the conviction that violence is regenerative, if committed to further ‘civilization.’”⁹⁰

Said’s concern was how depictions of culture could rationalize imperial modes of exploitation and domination. Yet although their depictions have shortcomings, Tolstoy, Marlinsky, and Lermontov (and perhaps Pushkin) hoped their writings would discourage the oppression and subjection of the Caucasus people. Importantly, for Said Orientalism was a function of great distance and unfamiliarity. Russia shares a long, complicated and ambivalent history with the Caucasus mountains and country. This history includes much oppression, and at its worst moments, polices of genocide. While the problems Said pointed out in the colonial relationships of America and France will sometimes be present in Russia’s relationship with the Caucasus, the Russia-Caucasus relationship is not an example of Orientalism as described by Said, as he himself recognized, as discussed below.

3.4 Was Pushkin’s *Prisoner of the Caucasus* Subversive or Imperial?

Pushkin’s poem tells the story of a wistful young Russian officer who seeks in the Caucasus an escape from the boredom of life in Russia. He gets his wish. Captured by the Circassians, he is chained up and neglected at the periphery of the village. A beautiful girl tends to him in secret and falls deeply in love while mourning her betrothal to an evil man. Although moved, the Russian officer is unable to fully give himself to her in return, himself prisoner to his other life.

As if set to swelling music, after days the young girl suddenly frees the officer. He is overcome with emotion and gratitude and pledges his love to her. It is she who perceives a deeper truth, the

⁹⁰ Layton, Susan. *Russian Literature and Empire: Conquest of the Caucasus from Pushkin to Tolstoy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995. Pg. 26.

impossibility of their union, and bids him to flee back to his former life alone. Together they walk to the river's edge, and the officer plunges into the water and begins swimming across. The Circassian girl stands on bank watching him go, and suddenly flings herself in as well. Upon reaching the far shore, the officer turns back and finds everything to be "as still as death." After some time, he sets off along the road. He tops the next hill and strides like a new man into the valley. As he does so, the sun is rising. Approaching Russian bayonets are glinting in the distance.

Suicide, unrequited love, an ugly betrothal, all these are familiar Pushkin themes. With this ending, one might reflect on symbolic parallels between the girl's dilemma and that of the Circassian fate itself—the approaching Russians like the ugly betrothal. The impassioned suicide might be equated to only authentic act available to the Circassians, a death that is tragic but uncompromising.

But the poem does not end here. Instead it closes with an epilogue in which Pushkin loudly praises Russian conquest and domination over the Caucasus. He proclaims the conflicts to be in their final moments, as the "mountain folk of the Caucasus" will not stay true to their "ancestral ways" and will "forget the call of hungry conflict." In all, the epilogue appears to be nothing but a nationalistic proclamation validating a mission to vanquish the people of the Caucasus.

Among the great Russian writers, Pushkin's epilogue stands out as the great exception.⁹¹ Lermontov and Marlinsky wrote with revulsion of the exterminatory and imperialistic efforts in the Caucasus,⁹² while Tolstoy's condemnation of the Tsarist program was categorical and fierce.⁹³

While widely celebrated for its poetic mastery, Pushkin's contemporaries were completely quiet on the matter of this incongruent epilogue (as noted by Lyles⁹⁴ and Layton⁹⁵). We should be careful

⁹¹ Layton, Susan. *Russian Literature and Empire*. Pg. 26.

⁹² Ibid., Pg. 25

⁹³ Ibid., Pg. 263

⁹⁴ John Lyles. "Bloody Verses: Rereading Pushkin's Prisoner of the Caucasus." In *Pushkin Review Volume 16-17*, Slavica Publishers: 2014. Pg. 233-254.

⁹⁵ Layton, Susan. *Russian Literature and Empire*. Pg. 102.

projecting reasons into the silence space. Did his critics detest the naked chauvinism, but were too afraid to speak publicly? Was it dismissed as an attempt to placate an impatient tsar who had banished a seditious poet? Did the nationalism make them uncomfortably aware of their own complicity in the destruction of the Caucasus? And as with everything Pushkin, this conspicuous silence by the Russian intelligentsia has received much attention from scholars since.

As context, often appended to discussions of this aspect of the poem is the private letter to the great novelist Ivan Turgenev from the poet Pyotr Vyazemsky, a leading figure in Russian literary circles. Vyazemsky and Pushkin were great admirers of each other and close friends, and Vyazemsky's public appraisal of *The Prisoner of the Caucasus* was one of four widely read, glowing reviews of the work.⁹⁶ Yet in a letter to Turgenev dated September 1822, Vyazemsky admits it was fear of the long shadow of government censors that prevented him from even alluding to his displeasure at the epilogue with which Pushkin had "bloodied his tale." In reading Pushkin's glorification such slaughter, Vyazemsky wrote he felt that "the blood runs cold and hair stands on end"⁹⁷.

Also invariably referenced is Pushkin's own letter to his brother, dated 20 September 1820:

The savage Circassians have become timorous; their ancient audacity is disappearing. The roads are becoming less dangerous by the hour, and the numerous convoys are becoming superfluous. It is to be hoped that this conquered land, which until now has brought no real benefit to Russia, will soon form a bridge between us and the Persians for safe trading, that it will not be an obstacle to us in future wars—and that perhaps we shall carry out Napoleon's chimerical plan of conquering India.⁹⁸

Lyle warns us against assuming too much about the intentions behind Pushkin's letters, subject as they were to the scrutiny of government agents.⁹⁹ Indeed, what kind of writer would Pushkin be if he failed to attempt to improve his situation by way of the surveillance of his personal correspondence?

⁹⁶Lyles, John. "Bloody Verses." Pg. 235.

⁹⁷Ibid.

⁹⁸Ibid., Pg. 236

⁹⁹Ibid., Pg. 253

The riddle of the great poet's true intentions has become a cornucopia of diverse scholarly speculation. Answers vary widely, and Lyle offers a compendium of contemporary examples:¹⁰⁰ The Soviet scholar Boris Tomashevsky (1890-1957) saw the epilogue as Pushkin's corrective attempt to remind readers of Russia's superiority, in case the story depicted the Circassian mountaineers in too sympathetic a light.

Katya Hokanson suspects Pushkin was afraid the poem portrayed the Circassians as *too* harmless—so harmless in fact that a Circassian beauty is able to nurse a prisoner back to health, start a romance, and deliver him to freedom, while his captors are too negligent, incompetent, or indifferent to throw up any serious obstacle. For Hokanson the epilogue was meant to reiterate their danger, their threat, and their need to be controlled.¹⁰¹ Susan Layton wonders if the epilogue was Pushkin's attempt to placate his own oppressors: the Russian oligarch that had banished him from Moscow in 1820 for his subversive tendencies. But she thinks it more likely that the epilogue was a true reflection of Pushkin's own views, as evinced by the letter to his brother and a proximal meeting with his friend Pavel Pestel, leading Decembrist dissident and advocate for Russian dominance over the border ethnic groups.¹⁰²

Stephanie Sandler however detects a callous Pushkin, concerned with literary achievement as he seeks to capture a representation of the Circassians as a once noble and tenacious people whose way of life is in decline. For Sandler, the epilogue is meant to be instructive. It clarifies the Russian project and the necessary fate the Circassians.¹⁰³

For John Lyle, Pushkin is of a talent transcending all these. A poem so loudly celebrated with an epilogue so conspicuously ignored? For Lyle, this itself is key to understanding Pushkin's intentions. *Of course* Pushkin knew how the epilogue would be received with discomfort in his own circle. And of

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., Pg. 236-240

¹⁰¹ Hokanson, Katya. *Writing at Russia's Border*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008.

¹⁰² Layton. *Russian Literature and Empire*. Pg. 102.

¹⁰³ Sandler, Stephanie. *Distant Pleasures*. Stanford: Stanford University Press. Pg. 49.

course he intended it as an affront to those who fancied themselves progressive. The epilogue exposed Russia's oppression by absurdly praising it, and so forced the Russian readership to face their dishonesty and hypocrisy.

Indeed, we can almost see the politic and cautious Vyazemsky squirming in chair as he writes his letter to Turgenev, bemoaning Pushkin's odious epilogue and rationalizing both his professional praise and professional reticence. This is Lyle's point, precisely. The epilogue implicates the elite in the destruction of the mountainous peoples they so romanticized. Pushkin is not about to let them have it both ways. A prisoner of exile himself, it is hard to imagine that Pushkin, so far removed from the toady Muscovite circles, would not find irony in the intelligentsia's loud praise of his poem and silent complicity in the destruction of the Caucasian people.

3.5 Are the Caucasus Russia's Orient?

The word "Orient" itself means Eastern, yet as a critical term, it has become unavoidably associated with the late Edward Said and his seminal 1978 work *Orientalism*. This pivotal book argues that the true Orient, a vast and dynamic collection of culture and peoples, was reduced to caricatures by foreign colonizers, and that in the course of this reductive process, the forces of scholarship, imagination, and supremacy worked together to uncritically produce a heterogeneous and popular version of the East, the *Other*, that placated the conscientious folk at home who might dissent or object and simultaneously served to further the colonizers' collective interests.

Much recent scholarship about the Caucasus has sought to explore the ways in which Russia's oppressive relationship with the Caucasus mirrors the French and English colonial relationships critiqued by Said. Edward Said himself never drew parallels between *Orientalism and Russia's history with the Caucasus*, nor should it be assumed Said would see accept this work as extensions of his own ideas. If not for Said's own misgivings about such applications of his work, I would be hesitant to admit my own. I

have trouble following a logical progression from Said's work to its application to Russian literature about the Caucasus.

Said himself said little about Russia, and with his typical guarded approach, was careful in what he attributed to Russia's imperialistic history. Rather than generalizing, his circumspection drew attention to differences rather than similarities between Russia's imperialism and his own subject, that of England and France.¹⁰⁴

These differences are so numerous that scholars attempting to co-opt the so-called Saidian methodology, often find themselves making significant detours for qualification and clarification. One example characterizes Russia's relationship with Caucasus as "a Russian kind of Orientalism: not the familiar model of a Western power conquering the East, but rather of a nation staring."¹⁰⁵ Another offers this tautology: Russia's own "semi-Asian status [demands that] Russian writers of the romantic era [make] a double demand on 'their own,' extremely varied orient [when writing of the Caucasus]."¹⁰⁶ A third publication has it that Moscow's treatment of the Caucasus both "[mimics] the Western narratives superiority over a 'degenerate' Orient identified by Said," while being "accompanied by a specific, simultaneous dissociation from the West..."¹⁰⁷

Another author avoids the question completely, and simply says "the mixture of *Orientalism a la Byron* with anti autocratic rhetoric made for an especially heady concoction," and makes the sweeping generalization that "Orientalism and exoticism had become integral components of European

¹⁰⁴ Said, Edward. *Culture and Imperialism*. New York: Vintage Books, 1993. Pg. xxii-xxviii.

¹⁰⁵ Brintlinger, Angela. "The Persian Frontier: Griboedov as Orientalist and Literary Hero." *Canadian Slavonic Papers*, 2003. Pg. 373.

¹⁰⁶ Layton, Susan." Nineteenth-Century Russian Mythologies of Caucasian Savagery." *Russia's Orient*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997. Pg. 25

¹⁰⁷ Oskanian, Kevork K. *A Very Ambiguous Empire: Russia's Hybrid Exceptionalism*, 2016. Pg. 3.

Romanticism." The citation in the footnote simply says, "For the seminal discussion of the phenomenon of Orientalism see Edward Said's *Orientalism*."¹⁰⁸ Yet this is not what Edward Said argued.

In a new afterword written nearly 20 years after the publication of *Orientalism*, Said himself offered an invaluable glimpse into his ambivalence about the interpretations and applications of his work. Not only did Said *not* suggest his approach was universalizable, he emphatically resisted the efforts to turn his wonderful book into a rigorous academic methodology. He loudly agrees with the would-be harsh theoretical critics saying, "Yet among American and British academics of a decidedly rigorous and unyielding stripe, *Orientalism*, and indeed all of my other work, has come in for disapproving attacks because of its 'residual' humanism, its theoretical inconsistencies, its insufficient, perhaps even sentimental, treatment of agency. I am glad that it has! *Orientalism is a partisan book, not a theoretical machine.*"¹⁰⁹ (Emphasis added).

Much new scholarship marching under the banner of the Saidian itself exhibits the objectionable tendencies Said detected in Western scholarship about the Middle East, such as a tendency to reduce culture and literature into a simplistic set onto which to apply a Saidian methodology.

Rather than draw on extensive historical scholarship and relevant literature, as did Said, a "Saidian analysis" of the Caucasus will often approach the offending documents for anything that smacks of feminizing, idealizations of nature as "untamed," any characterization of local people as noble and freedom-loving, the romanizations of the local women. They proceed by routing out suggestive metaphors, testing for descriptions of "dangerous beauty," and so on and so on.

¹⁰⁸ Hokanson, Katya. "Literary Imperialism, Narodnost' and Pushkin's Invention of the Caucasus." (*The Russian Review* 53, no. 3, 1994), 339. doi:10.2307/131190.

¹⁰⁹ Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. 340

Therefore, even in the excellent scholarship of Susan Layton, Layton calls attention to offending passages of Lermontov and Marlinsky.¹¹⁰ Here we find poetic renderings of a rivers, and trees and nature as virginal and effeminate, and the depictions of heroines as unblemished. This is treated as proof of Russia's imperialistic attitudes, and the phrases by these Russian writers are taken to be merely metaphors for the ill intensions of a looming imperial power.¹¹¹ For Layton, the smoking gun was Lermontov's characterization of a Georgian maiden. If Georgia was a beautiful, virginal maiden, in wait, Russia is the philandering conqueror, impatient. This characterization itself is proof of a Russian program of exploitation of the Caucasus. For Layton, to the rapacious mind of a Russian writer, any portrayal of Georgia smacking of pastoral sentimentality was an "erotically loaded idea of the passive virgin ready to gratify male desire and indeed just waiting for man to take advantage of her."¹¹²

But on what page does *Orientalism* argue that the discourse of power is indistinguishable from the style of a literary period or the artistic flourishes of a writer? One only has to flip through the pages of masterpieces like *Anna Karenina*, *Old World Landowners*, *Eugene Onegin*, or *Master and Margarita* to find similar manners of speaking about Russian and Ukrainian places and people. Edward Said emphasized that his thesis had the context of 40 years training in comparative literature.¹¹³ If Said can be said to have a methodology at all, it is not one that ever proceeded as a line-by-line dissections primed to cry "empire!" at any mention of a valley as *virginal*, a mountain man as *wild*, a landscape as *untamed*, the beauty of a woman *fierce*, or the perception of femininity in trees and rivers.

While Layton seeks to adapt Said's methodology of *Orientalism* to understand Russian's relationship with the Caucasus, her meticulous analysis also illustrates one of the most prominent differences between her scholarship and that of Said's. For Said, Orientalism was an amalgamation of

¹¹⁰ Layton, Susan. "Eros and Empire in Russian Literature about Georgia." in Slavic Review, Vol. 51, No. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.) 206-207.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. xviii

imperial of military might, economic preeminence, and reductive cultural interpretations. *This* is simply a different project than a textual analysis of social microdetail.

This kind of analysis assumes that Russian writers were possessed against their will by imperialism, thinking they were being poetic, but actually responding to an unconscious wish to exploit. On the contrary, is not the impulse to preserve and protect, also a reasonable interpretation of their loaded language? Is this not what these authors themselves professed to want? Don't these stylistic and poetic choices also appear in writing that lacks a historical context of imperialism? Is it not therefore possible the perceived Orientalist tendencies are projections of the critic, rather than the exposure of latent imperialistic attitudes?

While these worries are a minor problem in Layton's thorough scholarship, the problem here is that applications of *Orientalism* to the Caucasus are often simply examples of an *appeal to authority*, Edward Said's authority, which upon closer inspection do not seem to capture his views so much as repeat his terms.

For example, Angela Brintlinger offers the following analysis of the works of the writer and ambassador Alexander Griboedov: "First, we can see Griboedov as an Orientalist. Griboedov's correspondence and diplomatic reports are filled with evidence of his Orientalism... Nonetheless, [the content of Griboedov's letters] shows that Griboedov shared many of the attitudes of his British and French imperial counterparts and partook of the Orientalist discourse identified most famously by Edward Said in his *Orientalism*.¹¹⁴

Indeed, the paper's abstract begins by promising that her work builds on the "theoretical ground" carved out by "recent studies in the concept of Russian Orientalism," in order to reveal "a specifically Russian version" of Said's "dichotomy of Orient and Occident."¹¹⁵ It is not made clear what

¹¹⁴ Ibid.,373

¹¹⁵ Brintlinger, Angela. *The Persian Frontier*. Abstract.

recent scholarship Brintlinger has in mind here, but as far as Said goes, *Orientalism* was a term lifted right out of the discourses of the academies in which he had worked and studied,¹¹⁶ and of which he said “to speak of Orientalism therefore is to speak mainly, although not exclusively, of a British and French cultural enterprise.”¹¹⁷

It turns out that in Russia itself, the academic discipline of Oriental studies, *Vostokovedeniye*, has been a robust field unto itself since the 1840s, according to Professor Vera Tolz of the University of Manchester.¹¹⁸ Largely unacknowledged in Western scholarship is that these early Russian scholars themselves deconstructed terms like East, West, Europe, and Asia, analyzed the relationship between power and knowledge, and critiqued European treatments of the Orient. Tolz avoids referring to these Russian academics as Orientalists, citing its association with Said’s *Orientalism*. She opts instead to refer to them, in English, as Orientologists.¹¹⁹ Tolz argues that it was the scholarship of the Orientologists that anticipated analogous Western scholarship, such as Said. She writes:

Their conclusions about the relationship between power and knowledge at times sound so topical that I propose that contemporary post-colonial scholarship should be viewed as a ‘descendant’ of the early twentieth-century Russian.¹²⁰

Especially relevant is the extensive scholarship by Russian Sergei Fedorovich Oldenburg, whose work explored familiar themes such as the rendering voiceless victims of imperialism, and the false dichotomy of East and West.¹²¹ It should be noted Susan Layton dismissively sees “Russian Orientalism” as an attempt to bolster Russian scholars’ claim to be European.¹²²

¹¹⁶ Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. 2

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 4

¹¹⁸ Tolz, Vera. *Russia's Own Orient: The Politics of Identity and Oriental Studies in the Late Imperial and Early Soviet Periods*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011. Pg. 6

¹¹⁹ Ibid., pg. 3, footnote

¹²⁰ Ibid., pg. 5

¹²¹ Ibid., pg. 99-102

¹²² RadioFreeEurope. Interview with Susan Layton. *Literature and Empire: Scholar Susan Layton Discusses Russia's 'Literary Caucasus'*. November 13, 2011. Available at: www.fferl.org/a/24389678.html

The overlooked scholarship of Russia's *Vostokovedeniye* was also recognized in 1995 in the introduction to a collection of papers by entitled *The Russian Orient: Imperial Borderlands and People*. Even if the essays collected in their volume largely neglect this excellent point, these editors give *Vostokovedeniye* its due, saying:

Commensurate with anything that French, English, or German scholars have produced, oriental studies (*vostokovedenie*) in the Russian academy has a long and justifiably proud history of sound research, superb textual analysis, and substantial contribution to the archive of information about the peoples and cultures along the empire's southern and eastern borderlands.¹²³

Attempts to repurpose Edward Said are liable to be confusing for the simple reason that Russia has its own preexisting scholarship built up around phrases like "the Orient." These words have a different history and social context. Homegrown scholars had already labored to undermine the imperialistic behaviors of their nation.

However, that the terminology overlaps is terribly confusing is ultimately superficial. Much more problematic is that Said's subject is simply not the same. Given that Said himself saw significant differences with his subject and Russia, and also resisted the appropriation of his partisan work for theoretical frameworks, the onus of justification falls heavily on those who wish to use it for this purpose and apply it to Russia

3.6 Conclusion

An often-rehashed debate concerns how to categorize the countries of Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia, geopolitically. Are they Asian? Are they European? A popular topic of conversation within these countries themselves, this worry is also featured in nearly all country profiles and guide books on the area, and well as by outlets such as *Slate*¹²⁴ and *Huffington Post*.¹²⁵

¹²³ Brower, Daniel R. and Lazzerini, Edward J. (eds.) "Introduction." *The Russian Orient: Imperial Borderlands and Peoples, 1750-1917*. Washington DC: US Government, 1995.

¹²⁴ Kucera, Joshua *Where Europe Begins, or Where It Ends?* *Slate*. January 30, 2017.

¹²⁵ Pack, Jason and Segal, Jennifer. *Georgia and the Caucasus: Europe or Asia?* *The Huffington Post*. June 2, 2017.

Arbitrary as all this may sound, it is a modern example of a dichotomy that has long been projected by the West into this area of the world. They are to the east but felt to be not *entirely* Eastern. As early as the ancient Greeks, the Caucasus region made for a striking and enigmatic figure for eastward gazers.

The imaginations of the West have appropriated this region to tell its own origin stories time and again, from the mythologies of the ancient Greeks, through the Biblical scholarship the middle ages, and into the fields of linguistic and anthropology.

Modern and contemporary Western literature has portrayed it almost exclusively as a folky, adventurous appendage of Russia. Recent treatments of it in television and film have used the people and countries of the Caucasus as little more than a geopolitical foil for negative portrayals of Russia in latest standoffs of Russia versus NATO and the West.

Finally, Edward Said's groundbreaking and revolutionary book *Orientalism* did much to smash up the regressive status quo, and it is not surprising that his greatly successful and insightful work underwent distortions and appropriations similar to the ones he himself described. It is not obvious that Said's use of the term "Orientalism" can be appropriated to describe Russia's relationship with the Caucasus. At very least it should require a compelling justification, recognizing these worries and explaining why Said's *Orientalism* offers the best avenue for understanding the distinct and unique subject of the Caucasus. If proceeding, these analyses should at least appreciate and reference Russian scholarship about the Caucasus and distinguish their use of the term "Orient."

Western scholarship has tended to pass over Eastern scholarship with indifference, as Said knew only too well. One of the defining features of Said's critique was the practice of Western academics to assert their own discourse, paying no mind to the complexities perspectives of those they have selected as their focus. To casually assert the western scholarship of Said's *Orientalism* in such a way, recasting

the Orient and Occident dichotomy over different geographies and cultures, seems itself an example the sins Said preaches against.

This same point was made by Oldenburg over a half century before Said, Tolz describes:

Many European scholars believed that true scholarship did not exist in the East. ‘These scholars therefore paid little attention to the Eastern scholarly tradition [and to this tradition’s] interpretation of evidence, contrasting to it, as the only correct one, Western interpretations based on Western methods of research.’ In contrast, Oldenburg believed that it was necessary to acknowledge that ‘any cultured people, regardless of whether it is Western or Eastern, has its own understanding of its culture, which has to be taken into account and, often, even as a guide, by those who have the ambition to study these cultures in a scholarly way.’¹²⁶

¹²⁶ Tolz, Vera. Russia's Own Orient. Pg. 99.

Chapter 4: Kicking the Crusaders out of Khevsureti

The Georgian tourism sector has exploded over the past few years,¹²⁷ pulling into its orbit Khevsureti, a small region of about 1,000 km² on Georgia's northern border with Chechnya. Cafés, restaurants, and guesthouses have popped up along the mountain road and around popular destinations. In the capital, promises of bargain rates in Russian and English are commonly found in the windows of rugged vehicles, superimposed on images of famous Khevsureti attractions.

From Tbilisi, a drive to Khevsureti takes less than two hours, and another two and a half to its most famous site, the fortress-village of Shatili on the Georgia-Chechnya border. This makes Khevsureti a convenient jaunt for tourists aching to take in ancient towers and castles, snowy peaks, and sweeping mountain vistas with less than 48 hours to spare.

Khevsureti has long been home to the Khevsurs, highlanders famous for their stone fortresses and towers, their beautifully embroidered clothes, and for the much-discussed fact they carried swords and owned chain-mail. Thanks to these and their wonderful mythology, heartbreakingly love traditions, and so-called pagan religious customs,¹²⁸ the Khevsurs have always been a popular subject for articles, guidebooks, blogs, and popular ethnographies.

As anthropologist Paul Manning points out, the Khevsurs have become “the prototypical object of Georgian folklore and ethnography since the 19th century,” one result of which has been an eclipsing

¹²⁷ “Georgia Tourism in Figures.” Tbilisi: Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development of Georgia. 2016. <https://gnta.ge/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/ENG-2016.pdf>

¹²⁸ These practices are popularly referred to as pre-Christian and pagan, as if to imply they harken back to the pre-Christian days of Georgia. (James Scott makes this problematic tendency to regard mountain peoples as former, backwards versions of lowlanders a central premise of his *The Art of Not Being Governed*.) Georgian Ethnographer Zurab Kiknadze rejects this assumption and believes the so-called pagan religious practices as an innovative system forming after Mongol and Persian invasions cut off peripheral areas from the Orthodox center (Tuite, *Violet on the Mountain*, pg. 13). Animal sacrifices are still practiced in Khevsureti and neighboring Pshavi and often condemned publicly by Georgians on religious grounds, although the Georgian Orthodox Church has made no official condemnation of the practice.

of neighboring peoples.¹²⁹ This disproportionate attention to Khevsureti has also resulted in much distortion, as found in popular caricatures, cartoonish beer-swilling Khevsurs in television advertisements, a web of internet speculation, and a mushrooming tourism industry.

Yet, of all the caricatures of Khevsureti and the Khevsurs, one example stands out as the most pseudo-academic, tenacious, Occidental and ahistorical: the widespread speculation that the Khevsurs are the descendants of a band of lost Crusaders. In recent years, with much new interest in the area, this unfortunate meme has found new life. This chapter will not only examine how this idea has propagated itself, but also hopes to so thoroughly discredit it that it will cease to be entertained by sources such as tourism agencies, Wikipedia editors, and travel writers.

4.1 The Holy Crusader Meme in Popular Sources Today

The Caucasus has long provided bountiful raw material for Western and Russian story telling as well as convenient stages for modern political posturing, foils for national identities, imaginative settings for fantasy, proximal spaces for biblical extrapolations, and backdrops for historical-fiction. The region has also provided local populations for exploitation and decimation, and a plethora of stock and staple material for academic dissertation.

Thus, we find here heroes of great Russian literature, losing and discovering themselves. We read of the moral fretting of Russian elites over genocidal border policies. We encounter racist speculations of Caucasian racial origins. We see a carefully staged photograph of John McCain in South Ossetia reaching over a barbed-wire fence with paternal democratic concern. We read the Greek myths of Prometheus, of Jason and the Argonauts, and Medea in the strange lands across the Black Sea. We

¹²⁹ Manning, Paul, "Review of Ethnography and Folklore of the Georgia-Chechnya Border, by Shorena Kurtsikidze and Vakhtang Chikovani," *Anthropology of East Europe Review* 28, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 414

watch some of the best examples of Soviet cinema, whose directors used the empty homes of forcibly resettled communities as movie sets.¹³⁰

This chapter narrows its scope to Khevsureti, and to the widespread “Crusader myth.” In its most popular version, the story tells of a band of forlorn knights, perhaps lost or chased or abandoning their cause, who find themselves in a far-flung corner of the Caucasus. They settle down, find women from neighboring villages, and make the best of it. These men, so the story goes, were the forefathers of the Khevsurs, and their secret history remained hidden for centuries, that is, until sharp-eyed travelers detected remnants of their Crusader heritage in the habits and the dress of a degenerated progeny.

Today, tourism guides promise the full medieval experience, embellishing their services with an (often copy-pasted) crusader story. Blogposts¹³¹ and message boards¹³² abound, discussing the “Lost Crusader” origin story as a “hypothesis” and a “theory,” referencing “the experts” and “the evidence” of ethnographic and historical sources. Although this fanciful theory fell dormant during the Soviet era, after only a few clicks today, you will find yourself reading of a mysterious region and ancient people *whom many believe are descended from a lost band of Crusaders.*

It gets worse. A quick google search for the innocuous terms “Khevsur” and “history,” returns a list of pages, seven out of the first ten of which devote space to serious treatment of the story. In a 2014 article, *Washington Post* correspondent Bill Donahue states *as fact* that in Khevsureti one finds “nature-worshiping Christians descended from the last crusaders of Europe.”¹³³ Writer Jody Andrews of Westminster, Colorado, describes in his not-yet-published novel *The Wolf and the Lion* as “inspired by

¹³⁰ For example, Khevisberi Gocha (1960), The Khevsur Ballad (1965), Meeting in the Mountains (1966), and perhaps most famously, The Plea (1967).

¹³¹ “Georgian Highlanders and the Last Crusaders: The Debate on the Khevsurs Origins,” Liam’s Look at History (blog), May 22, 2016, <http://liamslookathistory.blogspot.com/2016/05/georgian-highlanders-and-last-crusaders.html>

¹³² “Descendants of Crusaders in Modern Georgia,” World Historia (discussion board). Accessed: November 13, 2018. http://www.worldhistoria.com/descendants-of-crusaders-in-modern-georgia_topic124881.html

¹³³ Donahue, Bill. “The Caucasus Mountains, in the spirit of writer Lermontov.” March 20, 2014. Accessed November 19, 2018. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/magazine/the-caucasus-mountains-in-the-spirit-of-writer-lermontov/2014/03/20/517cedc2-9278-11e3-b227-12a45d109e03>

the real-life discovery of descendants of 12th century French crusaders in the mountains of the former Soviet Union.”¹³⁴ Across languages, the Khevsur articles found on Wikipedia also give the story credible treatment.

Leading the way in countering these internet misrepresentations have been the efforts of Caucasus expert Alexander Bainbridge, whose excellent website batsav.com offers a compendium of highly detailed and well-researched information about the peoples of the Caucasus, including personal communications with scholars and his own translations into English of much material.

4.2 Historical Overview of the Khevsur-Crusader Meme

For the English-speaking world, Richard Halliburton (1900-1939) is the writer most responsible for popularizing the idea that a remote tribe of the Caucasus are the far-flung lineage of knights from the Crusades. Halliburton reports to have made the journey in the 1930s with his assistant Fritz, from the Black Sea to Tbilisi, and then up by motor to the lone trail that leads to Khevsureti. After strapping iron crampons to their boots, and glancing at the sky with apprehension, the pair brave the snowy cliff paths far above the icy river, and six hours later reach the first Khevsur village.

This account is found in a chapter entitled “Valley of the Crusaders” of his 1939 book *Seven League Boots*.¹³⁵ According to Halliburton, legend has it that the Khevsurs hail originally from the German-French region of Lorraine and headed east in the service of Frankish knight Godfrey of Bouillon (ca. 1060-1100). For support, Halliburton cites the Khevsurs’ French-style armor, noting that their “otherwise incomprehensible speech still contains six or eight good German words.” Whether they came as explorers, or fleeing for their lives, the legend does not say, he explains. What is known is they

¹³⁴ Andrews, Jody. *The Wolf and the Lion: The Story of the Lost Crusaders*. —Historical Fiction Author. Blog. Accessed April 25, 2014. <http://www.jodyandrews.net/blog/2014/4/25/the-wolf-and-the-lion-the-story-of-the-lost-crusaders>

¹³⁵ Halliburton, Richard. *Seven League Boots: Adventures across the World from Arabia to Abyssinia*. Garden City, N.Y.: Garden City Pub. Co., 1935.

entered the Caucasus, and did not emerge again until 1915, when their descendants heard rumors of a great war, donned the armor of their forebearers, and rode to *Tiflis* to join the good fight.

Just a few years before this account was published, the famous Lev Nussimbaum, writing in German under the pen-name Essad Bey, offered his own account of the Khevsurs' origin in his 1931 book, *Twelve Secrets of the Caucasus*. Like Halliburton, Nussimbaum cites their manner of dueling, their armor, and the inscriptions on their swords and shields. Unlike Halliburton, however, Nussimbaum equivocates, saying only, "Who can the Khevsurs be, the proud wearers of the Maltese cross, the cavaliers arrayed in steel? Crusaders, perhaps, driven from Palestine and forced back into the mountains, where they have gone wild, as the legends of the Caucasus will obstinately testify."¹³⁶

Nussimbaum appears to have borrowed heavily from an account by Arnold Zisserman, which first appeared in the Tbilisi Russian language newspaper *Kavkaz* in 1851. While Halliburton and Nussimbaum are far better-known literary figures in the West, it is Russian serviceman Zisserman who is most often quoted as an authoritative ethnographic source.

A more original German account can be found in a 1906 article by N. A. Busch, published in Germany's prestigious and well-established *Petermann's Geographical Journal*.¹³⁷ Busch had visited Khevsureti himself and references Zisserman before adding his own reasons for thinking the Khevsurs descended from Crusaders. Not only do their weapons suggest this connection, Busch thinks, but so too does the presence of tall blond men, their veneration of the Cross, a tradition of brewing sacred beer, and the silver cups depicting gothic buildings. He leaves it at that.

Just eleven years after Busch, in 1917, the notorious American sociologist Edward Alsworth Ross had his own encounter with Khevsurs, who were apparently taking part in a show in the streets of Tbilisi.

¹³⁶ Essad, Bey. *Twelve Secrets of the Caucasus*. Freiburg: Bridges Publishing, 2008.

¹³⁷ Busch, N. A.: "Chewsurien und Tuschetien." *Petermanns Mitteilungen*. Vol. 52, 222-27. Gotha, 1906. Archived at https://archive.org/details/bub_gb_OI7pAAAAMAAJ/page/n231.

Impressed with their knightly appearance, he inquires and is told of their supposed medieval ancestral connections. This account appears in his 1918 book *Russia in Upheaval*.¹³⁸ Ross was not familiar with either Busch's or Zisserman's accounts. Rather, these rumors were relayed to him by the famous Prince Orbeliani, "cousin to the present heir of the Georgian kings."

According to Orbeliani, as reported by Ross, the ancestors of the Khevsurs had fled the Holy Land and "settled in one of the high valleys of the Caucasus." To this, Orbeliani apparently added an incredible level of detail, such as that the original number of thirteen crusaders included eight French, one English, two Italian and two Spaniards, and that two Frankish names, since died out in France, were still to be found among the Khevsurs. He goes to say that Khevsurs cherished as heirlooms "certain heavy, two-handed swords that were wielded in Palestine by the forefathers of the tribe."

Although greatly taken by the tale, to his credit, Ross did not let the matter lie there. He raises the matter with "the scholarly director of the Georgian Museum." This clear-headed man informs Ross that the Khevsurs are not descendants of Crusaders at all, and that this nonsensical story began when a French writer speculated about a Crusader origin based on the crosses the Khevsurs wore on their garments.

This peripheral Frenchman is most likely the same Frenchman quoted as a source by a *Monsieur Edouard Taitbout de Marigny* nearly a hundred years before. Edouard Taitbout was a businessman and scribbler who had first shown up in Georgia in 1813 seeking commercial ties to Circassia. In 1821 Taitbout published *Voyages en Circassie en 1818*, in which he intones that a "fairly common opinion" holds that it was Crusaders who had been the first to preach Christianity to the mountain people of the Caucasus,¹³⁹ having just escaped a worse fate in their holy war. He explains, these ancestral traces

¹³⁸ Ross, Edward Alsworth. *Russia in Upheaval*. New York, 1918, Pg. 65.

¹³⁹ M. Taitbout de Marigny, *Voyages en Circassie en 1818*. Pg. 74. Archived at: <https://archive.org/details/voyagesencircas00marigoog/page/n74>

appear in the form of a Maltese cross worn by Khevsurs on their clothes and shields, and among them they have French names such as “Devilete, Guillot, etc.” In a footnote he informs the reader this information was relayed to him by a Frenchman, M. Huay.

4.3 Academic Criticism of the Crusader Meme from Historic Sources

Since Zisserman, the Crusader question has received almost no serious treatment, and if mentioned by a scholar at all, is raised only long enough to dismiss. The Caucasus scholars Shorenina Kurtsikidze and Vakhtang Chikovani have found this out-of-hand dismissal itself problematic. They object that, while so many denounce “the lost crusader theory of the Khevsurs” as baseless, “no one tries to prove the opposite!”¹⁴⁰

This remark was made in a response to Paul Manning’s review of their 2008 book *Ethnography and Folklore of the Georgia-Chechnya Border: Images, Customs, Myths, and Folk Tales of the Peripheries*. In his review, Manning takes issue with the title of the book’s first section, “The Last Crusaders and their Neighbors,” saying “it is ironic that this book, which takes Khevsur mythology as its object, would reproduce what is surely the most marginal of all romantic mythologizations of the Khevsurs,” and “one wonders why this particular discarded and debunked myth would become the central one linking this volume together.” Manning goes on to say, “Soviet-era scholars, and even pre-Soviet ones, had treated this particular theory of Khevsur origins as being an example of tendentious Occidentalism.”¹⁴¹

One such Soviet scholar was Sergi Makalatia, a Georgian ethnographer who, after briefly discussing the Crusader speculation, simply says “We will not discuss here Zisserman’s and others’ ungrounded hypotheses regarding the Khevsurs’ origins. These hypotheses are based upon merely

¹⁴⁰ Chikovani, V., & Kurtsikidze S., “Response to Paul Manning’s Review...” Pg. 321-324

¹⁴¹ Manning, “Review of Ethnography and Folklore of the Georgia-Chechnya Border.” 416

accidental similarities of external features. Unfortunately, these mistaken views on the Khevsurs are widespread today in both Russian and foreign literature.”¹⁴²

Similarly, the German naturalist and explorer Gustav Radde (1831-1903) merely bristles at Zisserman’s Crusader suggestion,¹⁴³ noting with dismay its notoriety before turning his attention to an analysis provided by Raphael Eristavi (1824-1901) who makes a case for a shared Kartvelian origin of the Khevsurs based on comparative linguistics in his 1855 book *On the Tush-Pshav-Khevsur District*. Eristavi himself must have been aware of the Crusader opinion, as he mentions his familiarity with Zisserman’s recently published articles about Khevsureti in *Kavkaz*,¹⁴⁴ yet he does not raise Zisserman’s Crusader idea at all, apparently judging it too irrelevant for discussion.

While Manning is correct in saying that the Crusader notion has been largely rejected by scholars, it is fair for Kurtsikidze and Chikovani to think that “the lost crusader theory of the Khevsurs,” deserves more than an appeal to authority before dismissal. And although their exclamation that “no one tries to prove the opposite!” might be accused of begging the question, it can also be understood as pointing out that negation and widespread disregard are not the same thing. In other words, while the Crusader story has received much derision, it awaits a systematic repudiation.

4.4 A Systematic Repudiation of the Crusader Origin Story

The repudiation that follows will show that the Khevsur Crusader myth is based on a few dubious details in circulation since the early 19th century which have created the illusion of legend and a body of evidence. Crusader paraphernalia in Khevsureti likewise has been misunderstood and exaggerated, and the occurrence of these items is neither mysterious nor suggestive, as this section will show.

¹⁴² Makalatia, Sergi ბეჭედური. Tbilisi: 1935. Pg. 20.

¹⁴³ Radde, Die Chews'uren und ihr Land. Pg. 40.

¹⁴⁴ Eristavi, R. D. “The Tush-Pshav and Khevsur District.” Zapiski of the CBIRG Soc., Vol 3. Tiflis, 1855.

Crucial to this story is the depiction of Khevsureti as a sort of time-capsule. Once this mischaracterization of Khevsureti is corrected, the story's incoherence naturally discredits it. Finally, this section shows that Russian serviceman Arnold Zisserman (the story's most prominent supporter) has been incorrectly identified as the story's originator, and that he himself gave it far less credence than is widely stated by both critics and sympathizers.

4.4.1 Dismantling the Khevsureti cocoon

Halliburton's chapter in *Seven League Boots* consolidates many details of the Khevsur Crusader meme, and helpfully offers a kind of cross-section of the body of Khevsur-Crusader speculation. Halliburton struggled to be taken seriously in his own time and was accused of rampant exaggeration.¹⁴⁵ But unlike Nussimbaum, not only did he visit Khevsureti, his dutiful research lends the tale a superficial plausibility. For instance, he mentions briefly that the French knights hailed from Lorraine and were followers of Godfrey de Bouillon. This was not pure invention but a wily coupling of associations: Godfrey de Bouillon himself is buried in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem, a church that holds a special place in the Georgian Orthodox tradition.¹⁴⁶

Halliburton also claims that the Khevsurs' "otherwise incomprehensible speech still contains six or eight good German words." What these German words were, he fails to record, yet this vague detail is suspiciously similar to a rumor mentioned by Edward Alsworth Ross, just a few years before, suggesting the nearby Ossetians were "Ostrogoths in origin, because their language contains various pure Germanic words."¹⁴⁷ More damning still is that Halliburton fails to mention what he could have

¹⁴⁵ Alt, John. *Don't Die in Bed: The Brief, Intense Life of Richard Halliburton*. Quincunx Press. 2014. Pg. 193.

¹⁴⁶ For example, the greatly revered Svetitskhoveli Cathedral in Georgia's old capital, Mtskheta, has inside it a copy of the Chapel of Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, which in the 11th century was watched over by Georgians. Stewart, Aubrey (Editor and Translator). *Ludolph Von Suchem's Description of the Holy Land, and of the Way Thither, Written in the Year A.D. 1350*. Cambridge University Press, 2013, Pg. 105.

¹⁴⁷ Ross, Edward Alsworth. *Russia in Upheaval*. New York, 2018, Pg. 65.

easily confirmed: the Khevsurs' speak a dialect of Georgian, very difficult to understand, but recognizable.¹⁴⁸

Yet, for all the trouble it has caused in the hands of the credulous, Halliburton seems to be winking at us while telling his story. A careful reader will notice it takes Halliburton only six hours to reach the first Khevsur village from the road to which they travel by motor. The pass they cross is open only seven months of the year. These details are buried under imagery of dangerous snow cliffs and mountain peaks, and Halliburton takes care to conserve facts even as he obscures them. All this suggests that Halliburton is interested only in telling a fun story, not an accurate one, which seems borne out by his own statements.¹⁴⁹ Charles Morris of Syracuse University argues that the swashbuckling, tale-teller persona Halliburton presented to the world was in part an imperative imposed by the times to obscure his homosexuality and support a clandestine lifestyle.¹⁵⁰ Whatever the case, if the suspension of disbelief was an understood premise of his popular books, this is lost on many readers today.

Lev Nussimbaum—who was born in Kiev, wrote in multiple languages, and lived in Azerbaijan and Germany—does not claim to have gone to Khevsureti. Like Halliburton, he also wrote about the Caucasus the 1930s, but shows far less restraint in his depiction of a cartoonishly cocoon-like Khevsureti. His account begins with the absurd claim that “a gigantic wall of rock surrounds Khevsuria”¹⁵¹ and that the region is only accessible by use of a rope hanging down the face of a cliff. For only *one* month, he

¹⁴⁸ For example, Johann Blaramberg writes “Khevsurs speak a dialect of the Georgian language, mixed to such an extent with different idioms of the Caucasus, that you can understand them only with great difficulty.” This is found in his 1835 book “Topographic, statistical, ethnographic and military description of the Caucasus,” commissioned by Czar Nicholas I who had ordered the compilation of a set of materials on the mountain and nomadic peoples of the Caucasus. In 1855, Raphael Eristavi addressed this detail in *On the Tush-Pshav-Khevsur District*.

¹⁴⁹ For example, “I want to write about the world as it is, and as I see it, instead of these adolescent romantic tales spun from a few bare facts, but I know my readers won’t accept anything else. I can’t write this stuff much longer; it gets harder and harder for me to do. Why can’t I just write the truth?” Quoted in Jonathan Root, *Halliburton: The Magnificent Myth* (New York: Coward-McCann, 1965), 204.

¹⁵⁰ Charles E. Morris III (2009) “Richard Halliburton’s Bearded Tales”, *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 95:2, 123-147, DOI: 10.1080/00335630902842061

¹⁵¹ Essad, Bey. *Twelve Secrets of the Caucasus*. Freiburg: Bridges Publishing, 2008. Pg. 90-97.

writes, is it possible to cross that same treacherous pass through which the “original inhabitants must have first entered.”

Nussimbaum never references Arnold Zisserman, but his chapter contains several paragraphs which seem to be little more than rewrites of Zisserman’s, including descriptions of Khevsur manners of dress, personal conduct, details of swordplay, religious practices, the exact same Latin phrase found on swords as recorded by Zisserman, and even Zisserman’s odd note that Khevsur women were in the habit of washing themselves in cow urine. As for their alleged Crusader link, Nussimbaum’s thoughts imitate Zisserman’s not only in precise detail, but even tone, right down to the tentative manner in which Zisserman first speculates about the resemblances.

Plagiarizing large sections of someone else’s work was not an isolated incident for Nussimbaum, who has become infamous for his skill at reinventing himself and borrowing heavily from unattributed translations.¹⁵² Most noteworthy is the beloved novel *Ali and Nino: A Love Story*, believed to have been written by Nussimbaum under the pen-name Kurban Said, and much of it thought to have been plagiarized from Georgian writer Grigol Robakidze’s (1880-1962) 1928 book *The Snake’s Shirt*.¹⁵³

Unlike both Halliburton and Nussimbaum, Zisserman respects basic geographical facts and maintains at least a pretense of impartiality. The Khevsureti cocoon he portrays relies on implication and vagaries. Phrases like “having entered this isolated realm,” a “place of dwelling protected by nature,” and “forced to stay here forever,” conjure up the notion of a cloistered existence. His imitators must go to great lengths to shore up this weakness in his flimsy hypothesis.

The plot device of a Khevsureti cocoon-plays a crucial role in the Crusader narrative, as it is the Khevsur/Crusader culture itself, preserved in time, that lays a foundational premise. To maintain this

¹⁵² Reiss, Tom. *The Orientalist*. Random House, 2005.

¹⁵³ Injia, Tamar. *Ali and Nino – Literary Robbery!* Norwalk, Conn: IM Books, 2009.

illusion, the story must find a way to not only plant the far-flung Europeans into the Caucasus, but also to keep them there, and create conditions sufficient to retain elements of their alien past.

Disproving the cocoon-like-Khevsureti-time-capsule idea is challenging, only because it is so vague as to resist a concrete formulation. It should be enough to show this *ad hoc* notion of the historical isolation of the Khevsurs, is not at all reflected in any analysis of the region's folklore, religious practices, social customs, history, or geography, all of which suggest the opposite.

Take for example Manning's ethnography of love in Khevsureti and Pshavi, which explores the similar Khevsur and Pshav love customs of *sts'orproba* and *ts'ats'loba*. Or consider Kiknadze's conceptualizations of *andrezi* and *sakmo* in the Khevsureti-Pshavi region to describe the organizing principles in cultural testaments, festival cycles, folklore, and the transcendent demi-god patrons. Also, look at Kevin Tuite's discussions of "Pxovian 'cosmological feudalism,'"¹⁵⁴ or his analysis of the similar customs concerning people struck by lightning among Khevurs, Pshavs, Tushs, Ossetians, and Kists.¹⁵⁵ None of this suggests a non-porous Khevsureti.

A reading of Makalatia's *Khevsureti* dispels the cocoon-illusion immediately. Khevsurs have long interacted economically with the lowlands, and Makalatia describes in detail the wars in which they fought alongside lowland Georgians throughout the 17th and 18th centuries,¹⁵⁶ and their mission to protect Georgia from northern aggressors in the 17th century.¹⁵⁷ In the early 19th century, they united with their fellow highlanders against the Russian military, well before Zisserman showed up with his Russian military uniform and notebook.¹⁵⁸

4.4.2 The Original Crusader Origin Story

¹⁵⁴ <http://www.mapageweb.umontreal.ca/tuitekj/publications/GippertFS-Xevsur-kurtxeba-Tuite.pdf>

¹⁵⁵ Tuite, Kevin, "Lightning, Sacrifice, and Possession in the Traditional Religions of the Caucasus."

¹⁵⁶ Makalatia. ბევრობი Pg. 37-40

¹⁵⁷ Ibid. Pg. 29-30.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid. Pg. 41-45

Arnold Zisserman is widely considered to be both a defender and the originator of the Khevsur-Crusader theory. Manning, Kurtsikidze and Chikovani, Grigolia, Makalatia, Radde, and Busch all refer to him as such, but are all in error on this point.

In the book *Custom and Justice in the Caucasus: The Georgian Highlanders* (1939), Alexander Grigolia¹⁵⁹ takes time to treat the Khevsur-Crusader connection with a special contempt. Grigolia shows how Frenchmen, Germans, and Russians have all taken turns to catch glimpses of their own cultures in the Khevsurs, and he cites the writings of *Monsieur Taitbout de Marigny*, the geographer N. A. Busch, and the archeologist Countess P. S. Uvarov.¹⁶⁰ Yet in making this excellent point, Grigolia seems to have overlooked the dates of *Monsieur Taitbout* in particular, and instead follows Makalatia and Radde in identifying Zisserman as the originator of Crusader-Khevsur connection.

Monsieur Taitbout de Marigny had been in the region as early as 1813, seeking commercial ties to Circassia, and rose to prominence as the Dutch vice-consul for the Black Sea by 1821.¹⁶¹ In *Voyages en Circassie en 1818* he writes that a “fairly common opinion” holds the Crusaders had preached Christianity to the mountain people, after having been displaced from their holy wars.¹⁶² Apparently undaunted by the seven centuries that had elapsed, Taitbout offers as support that a “Maltese cross” is to be found on the clothes and shields of the Khevsurs, and that French surnames such as “Devilete, Guillot, etc.” are in use among the Khevsurs.¹⁶³

¹⁵⁹ Grigolia himself was Georgian-born, and according to his biographer Chester Schneider, he escaped Soviet Russia in the coal bin of a ship as a young man, eventually making it to America where he earned his doctorate from the University of Pennsylvania and went on to establish the Wheaton College Anthropology Department.

¹⁶⁰ Grigolia, Alexander. *Custom and Justice in the Caucasus The Georgian Highlanders*. New York: AMS Press. 1939. Pg. 19-14.

¹⁶¹ Hewitt, George. “Western Travelers to the Caucasus.” Available at: <http://www.georgehewitt.net/articles/caucasus/275-western-travellers-to-the-caucasus>

¹⁶² Georgia has been Christian since the 4th century. In the 12th century, Queen Tamar imposed Christianity on the peripheries of Georgia, including the mountains to the north. It is unlikely anyone with historical knowledge of the area would have taken seriously the suggestion that Christianity was brought to the mountains by misplaced Crusaders, a point emphasized by Grigolia.

¹⁶³ Taitbout, *Voyages en Circassie en 1818*. Pg. 74.

Zisserman therefore did not invent the Crusader theory, as he claims. The idea was well in circulation at least 30 years prior. With Taitbout, we may be only one degree of separation away from the very first Crusader-Khevsur speculation: Taitbout informs us in a footnote that this information was relayed to him by a personal acquaintance, a *Monsieur Hauy*: “I owe this information to *M. Hauy major du Génie*, who may be the only European to have penetrated Khevsur society, where chance has led him, and where he was admitted on account of his being French.”¹⁶⁴

This Peripheral Frenchman referenced by Taitbout in 1818 is likely one and the same as the Speculating Frenchman identified by the Scholarly Director of the Georgian Museum nearly 100 years later, in Edward Alsworth Ross’s account. While the museum director would almost certainly have been familiar with the work of the famous Zisserman, it is this Frenchman he singles out for the American visitor as the perpetrator who first hit upon the Crusader origin idea.

It is easy to imagine that Zisserman was aware of Taitbout, who became an important figure in Georgia, and easier still to think that he had heard for himself the loose talk about a supposed Khevsur-Crusader connection. If so, he likely did not mean to claim the idea as his own, as his readership would have been familiar with it, but merely advance his more authoritative, firsthand version of it in the local papers.

Ross’s meeting with the Scholarly Director in 1917 also shows us that deference to Zisserman, as the originator of the Crusader story, was not absolute. This “widely-circulated” opinion looks to have been most fertile in expatriate circles: a Frenchman tells a Frenchman, who influences a Russian, and so on. Similarly, of those historical scholars to whom the Crusader idea sounds plausible, we have only Russians, Europeans, and Americans. All our Georgians—Eristavi, Makalatia, Grigolia, and the Scholarly Director—hardly think it worth discussing.

¹⁶⁴“Je dois ces renseignements à M. Hauy, major du Génie, qui est peut-être l’unique Européen qui a pénétré chez les Khévsours, où le hasard l’a conduit et où son titre de Français l’a fait admettre.”

4.4.3 Zisserman's Own Uncertainty

Did Zisserman have confidence in his own proposition? Academics have cast him in a variety of postures on this point. Makalatia refers to his Crusader notions as an “unfounded hypothesis” unworthy of further discussion.¹⁶⁵ Gustav Radde calls his opinions conjecture.¹⁶⁶ Busch goes so far as to say that Zisserman *believed* that the Khevsurs were of German descent,¹⁶⁷ but Grigolia characterizes him as expressing only an opinion of possible origin.¹⁶⁸ More recently, Kurtsikidze and Chikovani also say that Zisserman “believed the Khevsurs to be the descendants of an army of crusaders.” Manning impatiently calls him a “Russian romantic,” “who in the early 19th century, upon seeing the Khevsurs dressed in chain mail with Frankish swords, decided that they were a group of lost crusaders.”

My first readings of Zisserman’s original *Kavkaz* passages were anti-climactic—I had been looking forward to disapproving of Zisserman’s unconscionable carelessness and lack of scholarly scruples. Yet Zisserman, with his doubt and broad qualifications, took the wind out of my war banners. As silly as his musings may have been, he deserves credit for emphasizing their speculative nature.

In an ideal arena, nothing should deflate the Khevsur-Crusader fantasy more quickly than its main author’s own serious misgivings. For this purpose, I present translations of the two offending sections.¹⁶⁹ The most commonly cited source is Zisserman’s 1876 memoirs, *25 Years in the Caucasus*. The earlier instance of the story appears in 1851 in a newspaper article, which has remained relatively obscure. A comparison of these texts will show how tentative Zisserman’s opinions were from the beginning and will help explain why his name has become the nucleus around which this romance has grown. In his 1876 memoirs, he writes:

¹⁶⁵ Makalatia, *ხევსურეთი*. Pg. 20.

¹⁶⁶ Radde, *Die Chews'uren und ihr Land*. Pg. 64

¹⁶⁷ Busch, “Chewsurien und Tuschetien.”

¹⁶⁸ Grigolia, Pg. 10.

¹⁶⁹ Translated with the kind help of Artur Gorokh and Maia Tserediani.

Judging from these costumes, armor, and many swords with the engraving: "Solingen, vivat Husar, vivat Stephan Batory, Gloria Dei," and also from many of their habits and customs, I came to the suspicion, of course in speculation, are the Khevsurs perhaps the descendants of crusaders, some of whom could have been lost in these Caucasian mountain ranges, and been forced to stay here forever? Afterwards, they inter-married with nearby mountain Georgian tribes, they adapted themselves and adopted their language. Detailed descriptions of these extremely original people, I placed into the newspaper *Kavkaz* in 1847, I think. I don't find it appropriate to repeat it here; such long digression would completely halt the thread of my memories, while the descriptions of the traditions and manners of these mountain dwellers, told in those dedicated pieces, are quite interesting.¹⁷⁰

This cursory treatment in his memoirs defers significantly to his earlier articles and leaves the reader with the impression that this Crusader-Khevsur connection is better explored therein. In any case, his self-citation was off by 4 years, perhaps confused with the founding year of *Kavkaz*, which was in 1847. The relevant section in *Kavkaz* from 1851 reads:

Otherwise, I have often wondered, if they are not descendants of the Crusaders, which have been scattered over the whole world. Is it not possible a couple of them got left behind by their comrades, or else marched with the Georgian kings in the crusades, or else due to unfortunate events were scattered in the East, and having entered this isolated realm, they chose it as their place of dwelling, and perhaps married with neighbor mountain people, with Kists, Pshavs and Tushs, and founded a powerful military society, which was protected by nature, and their number perhaps gradually was added to from other refugees and resettled peoples?

For this hypothesis, which is not any less strange than [the Khevsurs own origin story], serves to explain the close similarities between the manner of dress and armament of Khevsurs and the crusaders, which do not look like those of any of the local tribes. They have square hats, with hanging leather straps wrapped in strips of cloth, the ends of which hang like cockades. They have chokhas the bottoms of which along the hem, are cut like strips of cloth, and scrunched sleeves. Iron shields, straight swords, all of them are covered with this inscription: "Genua Souvenir Vivat Stephan Batory, Vivat Husar, So lingen," and depictions of eagles, horseman and crowns. Women wear bracelets, earrings, dresses with several wrinkled layers which widen at the bottom into hoops, similar to the layers of a petticoat, they have wide woolen belts with two big tassels, on their heads they wear turban like wraps, necklaces, long socks instead of pants, and many other small things. All of this inadvertently reminds us of middle ages, of a time of knights, who fought for their faith... But I repeat, this is merely a proposition, not fact. In spite of the implication in his memoirs, the original article offers little to add in way of support of his Crusader speculations. Instead we find a few details about their clothes alongside more romance, more

¹⁷⁰ Zisserman, Arnold. "Двадцать пять лет на Кавказе (1842-1867) [Twenty-Five Years in the Caucasus.]" Saint Petersburg, 1819. Pg. 190. Note: The first English translation of Zisserman's memoirs was published by Narikala Books in 2018. See <http://narikalabooks.com/product/aquarius/>

imagination, but also importantly greater skepticism. Zisserman drives home its speculative nature: It is not facts, but his impressions that “inadvertently reminds us” of Crusaders. It is merely a proposition, *not fact.*¹⁷¹

4.4.4 The Khevsurs’ Medieval Weapons

When writing about his time with the Khevsurs in his memoirs 30 years later, it speaks to the power of meme that Zisserman selects only the Crusader speculation for mention, and even seems to believe he had better supported his argument. Evidently, he did not have a copy of his original article on hand, as in addition to misremembering the year, note the text of the inscription found on the swords has also changed slightly.

This inscription covering the “iron shields and straight swords” is a central detail in Zisserman’s Crusader proposition and has been faithfully cited by others ever since. In both passages, the reported engraving includes the phrase “Vivat Husar,”¹⁷² and a reference to Stephen Bathory. Zisserman likely did not have the resources to uncover the fact that Bathory is the family name of a line of Hungarian nobles, which rose to prominence in the 1400s, and that the most famous of the family’s Stephens was prince of Transylvania and king of Poland (1533-1586).¹⁷³ The Crusades ended well before the Bathorys’ rise, although interestingly, Stephen Bathory’s forces did invade Russian territories.

No other visitor to Khevsureti has recorded this inscription. Busch only says, “On the swords I could decipher only two words: ‘Ducat rex ...,’ on another stood: ‘S. D. Venetiae,’ on a third was only the date ‘1715.’” This is where Zisserman seems to have prevaricated. By recording only a Crusader-sounding Latin inscription, and intimating that it covered all the weapons, Zisserman creates the impression of a mass of weaponry of a common origin, say for example a Crusader event.

¹⁷¹ Zisserman, Arnold. “Очерки жевсуши [Notes on Khevsureti].” *Kavkaz.* No. 22. March 20, 1851

¹⁷² “Long live the Hussar!” Hussar were Hungarian Cavalrymen.

¹⁷³ “Stephen Báthory, *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 2018.

While the presence of these European weapons says nothing about the Crusades, they are interesting in the context of an inductive approach. Makalatia, for example, uses the preponderance of old weapons to illustrate his point that Khevsurs had little use for money, and that if a Khevsur man were to get hold of any, he would spend it all on the carpets or weapons from the lowlands that brought with them respect and influence.¹⁷⁴ Even better, E.G. Astvatsaturian's book, *Weapons of the People of the Caucasus*, offers detailed descriptions and photographs of many weapons from Khevsureti, and includes examples of old Russian and Iranian weapons.¹⁷⁵

The only specific detail offered by Zisserman, the inscription repeated in every sympathetic occurrence of his ideas, turns out to be, at best, immaterial.

4.4.5 Geographer N. A. Busch: The Only Other Scholarly Treatment

Finding even one serious treatment of the Khevsur Crusader origin story is difficult. The popularly cited Richard Halliburton and Essad Bay were commercial story tellers who offer no sources or evidence. Neither Edward Alsworth Ross nor *Monsieur Edouard Taitbout de Marigny* were Caucasus scholars, and both merely mention the story in passing as a curiosity and a matter of hearsay. Of those who mention the idea, Makalatia, Radde, and Grigolia all thoroughly reject it, in no uncertain terms. More recent scholars who have written about the area, such as Georges Charachidze (1930-2010), Ilya State University Professor Emeritus Zurab Kiknadze, and Professor Kevin Tuite of the University of Montreal, do not mention these Crusaders at all. Paul Manning discusses it only with disdain and frustration.

Finally, while Kurtsikidze and Chikovani of UC Berkeley harbor an inconsistent fondness for the tale, using it as a unifying theme in their 2010 *Ethnography and Folklore of the Georgia-Chechnya*

¹⁷⁴ Makalatia, ხევსურეთი. Pg. 61, 70

¹⁷⁵ Astvatsaturyan, E.G. *Оружие народов кавказа* [Weapons of the Peoples of the Caucasus]. St. Petersburg, Atlanta Publishing House. 1995. Pg. 136.

Border, even they, as early as 2002, add that “this theory, of course, cannot withstand academic criticism.”

In sum, only two scholarly works argue in favor of a crusader origin: Zisserman in 1851, and Busch in 1906. Both writers qualify their historical speculations with much uncertainty. As we have already dealt with Zisserman, N. A. Busch is the final loose end.

Busch’s account of the Khevsur Crusader origin appears in 1906 in the German geographical journal *Petermanns Geographische Mitteilungen*.¹⁷⁶ According to Busch, it is not only the Khevsurs’ weapons that suggest a Crusader connection, but also their 1) veneration of the Cross, reminiscent of Catholicism, 2) their practice of brewing sacred beer, 3) their use of silver cups with engraved gothic buildings, and 4) a preponderance of tall, blond men. The entire passage reads:

Since almost every Khevsur has to contend with others thanks to hereditary blood-revenge, everyone carries weapons with them. In addition to the usual weapons of the Caucasian mountain people—the dagger and sometimes shotgun—they very often have a complete knight's equipment—armor, shield, helmet, sword and gloves. It is obviously ancient. The owners value it highly, and it is inherited from generation to generation.

On the swords I could not decipher but two words: "Ducat rex ...", on another stood: "S. D. Venetiae," on a third was only the date "1715". Evidently these swords are of West European origin. Because of these swords and the particular cross-worshiping, some researchers (Zisserman) believe that the Khevsurean are of a largely Georgian [sic¹⁷⁷] origin, that their ancestors took part in the Crusades, and sought refuge in this rocky, remote area after failing, and now have become quite wild. Whether this idea is correct, remains questionable. Radde thinks they are unlikely.

At the conclusion of this paragraph, he adds the footnote:

I am far from deciding this question and I just want to express my personal opinion... I would like to go even further and assume that among the Khevsur people were Germans, for example refugees from the Crusaders. In addition to the knight's equipment, 1) the presence of tall blond men among them speaks for it; 2) the crucifixion and its venerations, which are reminiscent of Catholic usage; 3) the sacred

¹⁷⁶ Busch. “Chewsurien and Tuschetien,” 1906.

¹⁷⁷ The article has printed here “Grusinischer,” the German word for Georgian, which, given the context, makes little sense and almost certainly should have read “German” or “European.”

beer, which is otherwise quite foreign in the Caucasus; 4) the goblet in which are engraved gothic buildings.

Busch's account includes helpful details. He echoes Makalatia on the point that Khevsurs had a great fondness for weapons for both protection and symbols of prestige, and he also describes the inscriptions he saw on swords, recording only "S.D. Venetiae," "Ducat rex" and the date "1715."

In answering his four Crusader points, the notion that some Khevsurs may have been tall and blond need not be considered: being tall or blond are not exclusively 'German' traits, and old photographs of Khevsurs do not bear out this observation. The Khevsurs' genetic make-up likely includes foreign influences, e.g. from their neighbors, the Chechens, but with helpful insights of modern population genetics, the suggestion these traits are due to the persistent influence of German genes half a millennium prior is not realistic. Finally, even if goblets with Gothic buildings were found and shown to be German medieval relics, it would be quite a leap to assume that these had been brought by Germans, and an even greater leap to think them ancestors.¹⁷⁸

Grigolia takes up Busch's account in *Customs and Justice in the Caucasus: The Georgian Highlanders*, but dismisses the first three arguments he puts forward as evidence as simply not worthy of comment. Instead, he focuses upon the Khevsurs' tradition of brewing beer: as a German and fellow beer-drinker, Busch thought this might indicate a connection between the Khevsurs and the Germans. This is the only idea Grigolia thinks deserves an answer, and simply points out that, if indeed the Khevsurs acquired the knowledge of brewing from elsewhere, it was far more likely to have been acquired laterally, e.g. from the peoples of Asia Minor, or even from as close as Armenia.¹⁷⁹

4.5 Khevsurs' Traditional Origin Story is Meaningful and Plausible

¹⁷⁸ Engraved or decorated cups and bowls, some of them old, are still used during Khevsur shrine rituals to this day. The plates in Kurtsikidze and Chikovani include several photographs of such vessels, featuring religious scenes and Cyrillic writing.

¹⁷⁹ Grigolia, *Customs and Justice*. Pg. 10.

Khevsur tradition tells its own origin story. Several versions exist. This is the account offered by Raphael Eristavi:

A long time ago, a peasant from a Kakheti landlord, a resident of the settlement of Magrani, having committed offense against his master, fled to the Pshavi Gorge and settled in the town of Apsho. Here he lived and hunted animals with his son barely supporting his family. Once his son went far beyond their lands up into the gorge, to where now sits the village of Gudani, and here he killed a wild goat. His father, upon seeing how fat it was, turned to his son with these words. "My son! This land we live is poor and does not reward our labors. These mountains are barren and empty and do not produce grasses. Let us leave this rocky place and settle to the place where you hunted. Where a goat could become so fat, at such a place a person can also live. His son was however partial to the beautiful surroundings of Apsho. He had become attached to this region and so met his father's suggestion with silence. "I see, my son," the old man continued, "that you are torn. You do not want to leave your home in Apsho; but you see how difficult it is for us to live here." Then the old man gave his son a bag with wheat and said: Go, sow this wheat where you killed the goat and we will make our decision based on the results. The son did as he was told and the harvest was extraordinary. From a handful of wheat they received a full bag and so they decided to move there, calling this place Gudani. Here God gave the son two children: Araba and Ch'inch'ara who became the clans of Arbauli and Ch'inch'arauli.

Similar accounts are found in Makalatia¹⁸⁰ and Zisserman.¹⁸¹ Other versions include a third son, Gogoch'uri, such as in Giorgi Tedoradze's *Five Years in Pshav-Khevsureti*.¹⁸² Interestingly, both versions are found in Zurab Kiknadze book *Andrezebi*, a collection of examples of Khevsureti folklore as told by locals.¹⁸³

Clan associations based on these names and others found in Khevsureti are complex and fascinating. They are integral to both geography and the *Khati*, a word which refers to both local demigods and Khevsur holy shrines. This conceptualization of land is shared by many highland tribes of north-eastern Georgia and it is described at length by virtually all ethnographers of the region. Caucasus expert Alexander Bainbridge's excellent website includes many helpful discussions of these

¹⁸⁰ Makalatia, ბეჭურითი. Pg. 72-73.

¹⁸¹ Zisserman, *Kavkaz*.

¹⁸² Tedoradze, Giorgi. *Five Years in Pshav-Khevsureti*, Tbilisi: 1930. Pg. 6.

¹⁸³ Kiknadze, Zurab. *Andrezebi*. Tbilisi. 2009. Pg.: 15-18.

relationships, including his own lengthy translations of its treatment in Georges Charachidzé's *Le système religieux de la Géorgie païenne*.¹⁸⁴

Zisserman's worst moment may be when he suppresses the folkloric Khevsur tradition in order to promote a pet Crusader speculation. He says, "[My Crusader] hypothesis, which is not any less strange [than the Khevsurs' own origin story], is served by the close similarities between the manner of dress and armament of the Khevsurs and the Crusaders."¹⁸⁵

Contrary to Zisserman's suggestion, however, it would be hard to invent a more genuine-sounding origin story than the one found in the Khevsur tradition. Not only does it root Khevsur identity in upland agriculture, hunting, and Khevsureti itself, but it tracks geography, history, tradition, and even livelihood constraints that play into migration patterns.

This folklore also conserves the historical fact that the Khevsurs and the neighboring Pshavs were originally one and the same, inhabiting a region known as Pkhovi (now separated into Khevsureti and Pshavi).¹⁸⁶ Gudani's location and topography also make it the most likely spot for a new village in the area, as noted by Makalatia, and at Gudani are found the most important Khevsur shrines.¹⁸⁷

4.6 Conclusion: How the Khevsur-Crusader Meme Spreads

The internet contains a growing string of blogs, threads, and comments from people whose imagination has been captured by the story of a lost band of Crusaders in the Caucasus. Most examples of the story follow a similar pattern: they encounter the legend (often in an old copy of Halliburton), excitement builds, cursory research follows, the same exotic nineteenth-century portraits of Khevsurs wearing chain-mail are discovered, and they read excerpts of the authoritative Zisserman, feeling they have stumbled upon an old mystery. Inevitably the post or advertisement ends with something like, "No

¹⁸⁴ Batsav.com. "The Lands of the Shrine." Available at: <http://www.batsav.com/pages/the-lands-of-the-shrine.html>

¹⁸⁵ Zisserman, Kavkaz.

¹⁸⁶ Makalatia. "ხევსურეთი."

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

one knows for sure. We may never know—yet in every legend, is there not some grain of truth?” (Halliburton puts it this way: “No historian has found any reason to believe that the legend is not based entirely on fact.”)

In his account, Edward Alsworth Ross captures the same ambush of imagination perfectly: “A jewel of a story that! How it fires the imagination! But candor obliges me to record that the scholarly director of the Georgian Museum at Tiflis thinks that the Khevsurs are not descendants of Crusaders.”¹⁸⁸ The story that a lost band of Crusaders was preserved through the centuries in a corner of the Caucasus is so curious and compelling for many Westerners, the very hope that it might be true in itself becomes the unconscious principle by which material is selected and organized.

This paper has gone to great lengths to deconstruct and discredit every aspect of this fiction, yet there never was any good reason to give it any credit in the first place. And even disproven, strangely enough the illusion itself remains intact, floating unaffected above reality.

For example, consider this counterfactual: a historical source emerges showing that in the 11th century, a Crusader knight did indeed end up in Georgia, and settled in the mountains. Does this mean anything? Does it constitute new evidence that would help confirm the veracity of the Khevsur Crusader myth? The answer is no. The evidence put forward by Zisserman or Busch remains immaterial, yet the strength of the illusion itself is revealed in the sense that this somehow *must* be connected to the Crusader story somewhere in the black box of history.

Internet versions invariably cite another incidental fact perceived as relevant to the Crusader story. Historians Matthew of Edessa and Walter the Chancellor both mention crusaders being present at the famous Battle of Didgori in 1121 where King David the Builder won a decisive victory for Georgia

¹⁸⁸ Ross. *Russia in Upheaval*. Pg. 65.

against the Seljuks and Persians, Georgia's longtime oppressors.¹⁸⁹ True enough, it is not impossible that a Crusader ran up into the mountains and settled there. It doesn't matter. It is the wishful thinking hidden in the illusion that makes this historical proximity and possibility *seem* relevant. Richard Dawkins' coined the term *meme* to describe how ideas, like genes, pass themselves from one vehicle to another and spread. In this way, the story itself, using human minds as its medium, working backwards, subtly selecting or rejecting ideas, facts, or rumors, making connections at the points of coincidence, all of this allows it to ambush the imagination. In a real sense, it is the story itself that "sees" evidence of a Crusader ancestry in incidental Latin phrases, or religious symbols like crosses, or armor, or beer, or words overheard believed to be French or German, or tall blond men, or engravings in goblets...

189 Tinikashvili, David & Kazaryan Ioane. "Crusaders and Georgia: A Critical Approach to Georgian Histography." *Kadmos*. 6, 2014. Ily State University. Pg. 33-34.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Agenda.ge. "Mountain Law: Benefits for Georgia's alpine population in 2016." Available at: <http://agenda.ge/news/40108/eng>

Alt, John. *Don't Die in Bed: The Brief, Intense Life of Richard Halliburton*. Quincunx Press. 2014.

Astvatsaturyan, E.G. *Оружие народов кавказа* [Weapons of the Peoples of the Caucasus]. St. Petersburg. Atlanta Publishing House. 1995.

Batsav.com. *The Lands of the Shrine*. Available at: <http://www.batsav.com/pages/the-lands-of-the-shrine.html>

Blumenbach, J. F. *Anthropological treatises of Johann Friedrich Blumenbach*. 1865 Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.5962/bhl.title.50868>

Brintlinger, Angela. *The Persian Frontier: Griboedov as Orientalist and Literary Hero*. Canadian Slavonic Papers, 2003.

Brower, Daniel R. and Lazzerini, Edward J. (eds.) "Introduction" in *The Russian Orient: Imperial Borderlands and Peoples, 1750-1917*. Washington DC: US Government, 1995.

Build.gov.ge. "Projects 2017-2020." Available at: <http://build.gov.ge/en/projects?title=Roshka>

— "Construction of Sno-Juta-Roshka-Shatili-Omalo-Khadori Gorge-Batsara-Akhmeta road," Accessed December 12, 2018. Available at: <http://build.gov.ge/en/content/construction-sno-juta-roshka-shatili-omalo-khadori-gorge-batsara-akhmeta-road>

Busch, N. A.: "Chewsurien und Tuschetien," in *Petermann's Mitteilungen*. Vol. 52, 222-27. Gotha, 1906. Archived at https://archive.org/details/bub_gb_OI7pAAAAMAAJ/page/n231.

CENN. *Assessment of the Recreational Potential of Georgian Forests*. Austrian Development Cooperation. 2016. Available at: http://environment.cenn.org/app/uploads/2018/01/1_CENN_Recreational-Potential-of-Georgian-Forests ADA-SFG2_171002.pdf

Charles E. Morris "Richard Halliburton's Bearded Tales", *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 2009, 95:2, 123-147, DOI: 10.1080/00335630902842061

Chikovani, V, & Kurtsikidze S., "Response to Paul Manning's Review of the Publication "Ethnography and Folklore of the Georgia-Chechnya Border: Images, Customs, Myths, and Folk Tales of the Peripheries," in *Anthropology of East Europe Review*, 2010. 321-324.

Civil.ge, "Parliament Adopts Bill on Benefits for High Mountainous Regions." Published July 17, 2015. Available at: <https://old.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=28444>

Clayton, J Douglas. "Dumas in Russia and the Caucasus: The Myth and Its Contemporary Echoes," in *Other Voices: Three Centuries of Cultural Dialogue Between Russia and Western Europe*. Newcastle upon Tyne, UK. Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011.

Donahue, Bill. "The Caucasus Mountains, in the spirit of writer Lermontov." March 20, 2014. Accessed November 19, 2018. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/magazine/the-caucasus-mountains-in-the-spirit-of-writer-lermontov/2014/03/20/517cedc2-9278-11e3-b227-12a45d109e03>

Encyclopedia Britannica. "Stephen Báthory." 2018

Eristavi, R. D. "The Tush-Pshav and Khevsur District." Zapiski of the CBIRG Soc., Vol 3. Tiflis, 1855.

Essad, Bey. *Twelve Secrets of the Caucasus*. Freiburg: Bridges Publishing, 2008.

First Channel. "The Ministry of Regional Development will develop the Strategy and Action Plan for 2019-2023 Mountain Development." August 22, 2018. Accessed at: <https://1tv.ge/news/mtis-ganvitarebis-2019-2023-wlebis-strategiasa-da-samoqmedo-gegmas-regionuli-ganvitarebis-saministro-shei-mushavebs/>

Galt & Taggart Research. *Georgia's Tourism Sector, Shifting into High Gear*. June 21, 2016. Retrieved from: galtandtaggart.com/dw/downloadReport.php?fl=343

Georgia Revenue Service. "Privileges and Rights/Liabilities of High Mountain Settlement Enterprise." Accessed December 11, 2018, at: http://www.rs.ge/Default.aspx?sec_id=4723&lang=1&catid=101

Georgia Tourism in Figures. Tbilisi: Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development of Georgia. 2016. Available at: <https://gnta.ge/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/ENG-2016.pdf>

Geostat. The General Description of the Population of 2014," Tbilisi: Geostat. 2015. Available at: <http://census.ge/files/results/english/>

Grigolia, Alexander. *Custom and Justice in the Caucasus The Georgian Highlanders*. New York: AMS Press. 1939.

Halliburton, Richard. "Seven League Boots: Adventures across the World from Arabia to Abyssinia." Garden City, N.Y.: Garden City Pub. Co., 1935.

Hokanson, Katya. "Literary Imperialism, Narodnost' and Pushkin's Invention of the Caucasus." (The Russian Review 53, no. 3, 1994), 339. doi:10.2307/131190.

— *Writing at Russia's Border*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008.

— "The Geography of Russian Romantic Prose," in *The Oxford Handbook of European Romanticism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016.

Injia, Tamar. *Ali and Nino – Literary Robbery!* Norwalk, Conn: IM Books, 2009.

Jersild. Orientalism and Empire. Pg.

John Lyles. "Bloody Verses: Rereading Pushkin's Prisoner of the Caucasus." In Pushkin Review Volume 16-17, Slavica Publishers: 2014.

Kiknadze, Zurab. Andrezebi. Tbilisi. 2009.

King, Charles. *The Ghost of Freedom: A History of the Caucasus*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008)

Kiziria, Dodona. "Amirani, a Georgian Folk Hero." Indiana University, Department of Folklore and Ethnomusicology. 1974.

Kucera, Joshua *Where Europe Begins, or Where It Ends?* Slate. January 30, 2017.

Layton, Susan. Russian Literature and Empire: Conquest of the Caucasus from Pushkin to Tolstoy. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995

— “Eros and Empire in Russian Literature about Georgia.” in *Slavic Review*, Vol. 51, No. 2. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Pg. 195.

— “Nineteenth-Century Russian Mythologies of Caucasian Savagery” in *Russia's Orient*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997. Pg. 25

— Interview with Susan Layton: *Literature and Empire: Scholar Susan Layton Discusses Russia's 'Literary Caucasus.'* RadioFreeEurope. November 13, 2011. Available at: www.rferl.org/a/24389678.html

Lomidze, Eka. *A Dirt Road of Dreams: Road from Roshka to Arkhoti to be Laid by Khevsurians*. Tbilisi: Georgian Journal. November 5, 2015. Available at: <https://www.georgianjournal.ge/society/31746-a-dirt-road-of-dreams-road-from-roshki-to-arkhoti-to-be-laid-by-khevsurians.html>

Lyles, John. "Bloody Verses: Rereading Pushkin's Prisoner of the Caucasus." In *Pushkin Review Volume 16-17*, Slavica Publishers, 2014. Pg. 235.

M. Taitbout de Marigny, *Voyages en Circassie en 1818*. Pg. 74. Archived at: <https://archive.org/details/voyagesencircas00marigoog/page/n74>

Makalatia, Sergei. *Khevsureti*. (Georgian.) Tbilisi: 1930.

Manning, Paul, “Review of Ethnography and Folklore of the Georgia-Chechnya Border by Shorena Kurtsikidze and Vakhtang Chikovani,” *Anthropology of East Europe Review* 28, no 1 (Spring 2010): 414

— Love Stories: Language, Private Love, and Public Romance in Georgia. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015.

— *Materiality and Cosmology: Old Georgian Churches as Sacred, Sublime, and Secular Objects*. Ethnos, 73:3, 327-360, DOI: 10.1080/00141840802324011

Municipal Development Fund of Georgia (MDF). “The Strategic Environmental, Social and Cultural Heritage Assessment of the Regional Development and Tourism Development Strategies of Samtskhe-Javakheti and Mtskheta-Mtianeti.” World Bank: December 2016.

Metcalf, George. *On Language Diversity and Relationship from Bibliander to Adelung*. Amsterdam. John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2013.

Ministry of Georgian Cultural Heritage Agency. *Rehabilitation of Shatili 6th Tower*. October 2017. Available at: https://heritagesites.ge/ka/news_item/37

Ministry of Regional Development and Infrastructure of Georgia. *Regional Development Programme of Georgia 2015-2017*. July 9, 2014 Tbilisi. Available at: <http://mrdi.gov.ge/en/news/regional-development-program-georgia-2015-2017-rdp>.

Mtisambebi.ge. "Arriving to the Villages of Arkhoti for the First Time," (Georgian). April 25, 2017. Retrieved from: <http://mtisambebi.ge/news/people/item/444-pirvelad-arkotis-soplebshi-samanqane-gzit-ivlisshi-mivalt>

National Statistics Office of Georgia. *The General Description of the Population of 2014*. Tbilisi: 2015. Available at: <http://census.ge/files/results/english/>

OECD. *The Impact of Culture on Tourism*. 2009. Available at: <http://www.oecd.org/cfe/tourism/theimpactofcultureontourism.htm>

Oskanian, Kevork K. A Very Ambiguous Empire: Russia's Hybrid Exceptionalism, *Europe-Asia Studies*, 70:1, 26-52, 2018. DOI: 10.1080/09668136.2017.1412398

Pack, Jason & Segal, Jennifer. *Georgia and the Caucasus: Europe or Asia?* The Huffington Post. June 2, 2017

Radde, Die Chews'uren und ihr Land.

Reiss, Tom. *The Orientalist*. Random House, 2005

Reynolds, Susan. "Medieval "Origines Gentium" and the Community of the Realm." *History* 68, no. 224 (1983).

Robinson, Michael F. *The Lost White Tribe: Explorers, Scientists, and the Theory That Changed a Continent*. New York. Oxford University Press, 2016.

Ross, Edward Alsworth. *Russia in Upheaval*. New York, 2018,

Said, Edward. *Culture and Imperialism*. New York: Vintage Books, 1993.

— Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient. London. Penguin Classics, 2003.

Sandler, Stephanie. *Distant Pleasures*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Scott, James. *The Art of not Being Governed*.

Steinbeck, John. *A Russian Journal*. London: Penguin Classics, 2001.

Taitbout, Voyages en Circassie en 1818.

Tedoradze, Giorgi. 'Five Years in Pshav-Khevsureti', Tbilisi: 1930.

Tinikashvili, David & Kazaryan Ioane. *Crusaders and Georgia: A Critical Approach to Georgian Histography*. Kadmos. 6, 2014. Ilya State University.

Tolz, Vera. *Russia's Own Orient: the Politics of Identity and Oriental Studies in the Late Imperial and Early Soviet Periods.* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

Tuite, Kevin, "Lightning, Sacrifice, and Possession in the Traditional Religions of the Caucasus."

— "Violet on the Mountain," National Character, Religion, and Beliefs, footnote. Pg. 6.

Tuite *Lightning, Sacrifice, and Possession* pg. 20

UNDP. *Georgia Adopts a Law on the Development of Mountainous Regions.* July 31, 2015. Available at: <http://www.ge.undp.org/content/georgia/en/home/presscenter/pressreleases/2015/07/31/georgia-adopts-a-law-on-the-development-of-mountainous-regions-.html>

USAID. New Economic Opportunities Initiative: Final Report. December 2015. Pg. 32.

World Bank. "A Tourism Strategy for Georgia – New Path Ahead." December 7, 2015. Available at: <http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2015/12/07/a-tourism-strategy-for-georgia-new-path-ahead>

Zisserman, Arnold. "Двадцать пять лет на Кавказе (1842-1867) [Twenty-Five Years in the Caucasus.]" Saint Petersburg, 1819. Note: The first English translation of Z's memoirs was published by Narikala Books in 2018. See <http://narikalabooks.com/product/aquarius/>

— "Очерки жевсуии [Notes on Khevsureti]." *Kavkaz.* No. 22. March 20, 1851