

## ARMENIANS AND THEIR DIALECTS IN ABKHAZIA<sup>1</sup>

V.A. CHIRIKBA

### 1. Abkhazia

Abkhazia is a small country situated between the Republic of Georgia and the Russian Federation on the western Caucasian Black Sea coast. In various times Abkhazia was a kingdom, a principality, a region of the Russian Empire, and a Soviet republic, first with the status of an SSR, and then as an Autonomous SSR within the Georgian SSR. After the collapse of the USSR, in 1993 Abkhazia managed to secede from Georgia as a result of a short but bloody war, and since then has remained a *de facto* independent though not recognized self-governed state. The Abkhazians, a people speaking a West Caucasian language (akin to Circassian and the recently extinct Ubykh), and who before 1864 comprised the majority of the population of the country, represent the indigenous population. After the Russian incorporation of Abkhazia in 1864, a series of anti-colonial rebellions followed which were severely punished by the Russians, who declared the Abkhazians “a guilty population”. Fearing reprisals, tens of thousands of Abkhazians fled to the Ottoman Empire, while many others were forcefully deported to Turkey. Thus, by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Abkhazia had lost up to 60% of its indigenous population. The emptied lands were subjected to colonization by Russians, Megrelians, Georgians, Svans, Turkish Armenians, Pontic Greeks, Estonians and other groups.

### 2. The history of the Armenian settlements in Abkhazia

The first Armenians settled in Abkhazia in the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, after the Russian-enforced exodus of Abkhazians. Following a Russo-Turkish agreement on population exchange allowing the Muslim peoples of Russia to move to Turkey and the Christian subjects of Turkey, notably the Armenians and Greeks, to come to Russia, many Armenians came to the Caucasian Black Sea coast. The Berlin conference of 1878 allowed the resettlement of Turkish Christians in Russia within a period

---

<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Hraç Martirosyan and Hovann Simonian for their valuable suggestions and corrections on the text of this paper. I also thank Anna Keropian for her kind assistance in working with Armenian informants in Abkhazia.

of three years (Dzidzarija 1982: 440). Besides, an indeterminate number of Armenians used to come to Abkhazia as seasonal workers even before their emigration from Turkey, leasing the land and engaging in the lucrative business of tobacco growing. These Armenians were mainly from the provinces of Trabzon (Trebizond) and Samsun, where the same tobacco varieties were grown. Apart from economical reasons, Armenians were migrating to Abkhazia and elsewhere in the Caucasus because of the persecutions and forced Islamization in Turkey.

Thus, at the end of autumn of 1879, 125 Armenians from the *kaza* (sub-province) of Çarşamba (part of the Trebizond *vilayet*, i.e. province) arrived in Abkhazia. In 1887 Armenians settled in the village of Mtsara (Abx *mc'ara* > Arm *mejara*). Several years later, in 1890, Armenians from Ordu settled in the village of Labra in the Ochamchyra region. In 1897 twenty Hamshen families from Samsun moved to the shores of Pitsunda in Abkhazia (Dzidzarija 1982: 439-440; Minasjan 1996: 48). The Armenian immigration to Abkhazia was intensified in the 1890s. Another large wave of Armenian immigration from Turkey took place in the wake of the bloody atrocities of 1915-1916, when tens of thousands of Armenians had to flee the country. Many of these refugees arrived in the Caucasus, in particular in Abkhazia.

Having started in the 1870s, the emigration of Armenians to Abkhazia continued up to the Russian revolution of 1917. Czarist policies encouraged this immigration to the Caucasian Black Sea coast for both economical and political reasons, as, on the one hand, Russia needed manpower to develop a region deserted by the expelled Abkhazians, Circassians and Ubykhs and, on the other hand, it needed to colonize the Black Sea coast by a "loyal" Christian population, which included Cossacks, Megrelians, Georgians, Armenians and Greeks. After the 1917 Revolution the immigration took on a more spontaneous character. Thus, in 1923 a group of Hamshen Armenians under the leadership of the partisan Artin Arzumanian managed to leave Turkey and settle in the Gagra district of Abkhazia (Minasjan 1996: 55). But the majority of Armenians were coming now not directly from Turkey, but from or through the Batum and Akhaltsikhe regions of Georgia. The major attractions of the immigration to Abkhazia were the mild subtropical climate and the availability of land.

The newly arrived Armenians quickly began to acquire the skills needed for new economical activities. The majority of them started tobacco plantations. In Soviet times, the main occupation became the growing of citrus fruits, tobacco, tea and grapes. Besides, especially in the Gagra region, cattle-breeding on mountain pastures (so-called *yayla*, or summer camp economy) was popular, as much as in the Hamshen

homeland. On the whole, the nature, climate and mountainous landscape of Abkhazia resemble much that of the Hamshen area.

### 3. The Hamshen region in Turkey

The region of Hamshen is situated to the east of the Black Sea town of Rize. In Ottoman times it was a part of the Trebizond *vilayet* of the Empire. The territory of Hamshen is a mountainous area, a part of the Pontic Alps, with deep ravines and high mountains, the highest of which is the Kaçkar (3932 m). By the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century there were some 50 Armenian villages in this area. The traditional occupation were agriculture, animal husbandry, crafts and partially trade (Minasjan 1996: 17). Besides Turks, the Hamshen Armenians had as neighbours the Laz, Pontic Greeks and (Adzhar) Georgians, and their material culture was close to that of the Laz (Minasjan 1996: 5).

The lack of land and poverty forced many Hamshen people to leave their homeland and go abroad, to the Caucasus, to Russia and even as far as Rumania. Earlier, in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Hamshen Armenians partially moved to the neighbouring Ordu and Dzhaniik (Samsun) regions, both for political and religious reasons (forced Islamization, starting from the 16th century) and for economical reasons. The first large waves of migration of the Hamshens abroad, in particular to the Caucasus, took place after the Turkish-Russian war of 1877-1878. The migration of Armenians took on such a scale that in 1896 the Ottoman government officially forbade Armenians to leave Turkey. Despite these restrictions, the Armenians were secretly leaving the country. Another large wave of Armenian exodus was caused by the tragic events of 1915-1916.

Three main groups of the Hamshen Armenians are known (cf. Vaux 2001): the western (in the province of Rize), the eastern (in the province of Artvin) and the northern (in the regions of Samsun, Ordu, Giresun and Trabzon). Nowadays those Hamshens (called in Turkish *hemşinli*), who remained to live in Turkey (the western and eastern groups), are Sunni Muslim and their self-consciousness is ethnic Turkish, with some local peculiarities and with a residual knowledge of Armenian. Probably only elders are aware of their Armenian roots.<sup>2</sup> Those northern Hamshen Armenians who managed to go abroad earlier, in particular to the Caucasus, including Abkhazia, remained Christian and preserved their Armenian identity, language and elements of traditional culture.

---

<sup>2</sup> On the past and present of the Hamshens in Turkey, see Mouradian 2001.

#### 4. Contemporary situation

Even before the early Soviet period with its policy of supporting the minority cultures and languages, the Abkhazian Armenians were engaged in various kinds of cultural activities. Thus, a prominent cultural figure Xač<sup>h</sup>atur Avdalbekyan organized the Union of Armenian Teachers of Abkhazia and the literary-enlightenment newspaper "Luys" ("The light"). The Union founded an Armenian printing house, a bookshop with Armenian books, and amateur theater groups. The most prominent organizing structure was undoubtedly the Armenian Apostolic Church, which morally supported the Armenians and provided spiritual leadership.

The contemporary situation is characterized, on the one hand, by freedom in expressing ethnic identity and in organizing institutions, and, on the other hand, by the difficult economical situation caused by the collapse of the Soviet Union and exacerbated by the devastating Georgian-Abkhaz war of 1992-1993. The Armenian cultural institutions in Abkhazia are functioning under the aegis of the cultural-charity organization "Krunk" ("Crane"). There is a Russian-Armenian newspaper "Hamšen" published in Sukhum, and in Gagra the local charity organization "Maštoc<sup>h</sup>" issues a newspaper with the same title.

The Armenian community is represented in the Abkhaz parliament by several deputies, and there are Armenians in the government. There is a functioning Armenian sector in the pedagogical faculty of the state University in Sukhum, which prepares teachers for Armenian schools. Although there are Armenian schools all over Abkhazia, the language of instruction is Standard East Armenian (SEA), which may differ substantially from the dialects they speak. This is a factor which affects the prestige of the local vernacular, regarded as "uncultivated" when compared with Standard Armenian. Despite the efforts of some enthusiasts to publish in Armenian dialects, the majority of Armenian publications in Abkhazia are in SEA.

The main problems for the Armenian community in Abkhazia are the continued Russian-Georgian economical embargo of Abkhazia, the broken ties with Armenia and the lack of funds. Though the Armenians so far have preserved their language intact, the urban milieu in Abkhazia is predominantly Russian-speaking, which necessitates a good knowledge of Russian for communication, education and career opportunities. Because of the impossibility (for financial reasons) for many young Armenians to go to study in Armenia, which was the case during the Soviet period, the importance of Russian among the Abkhazia Armenians is rising substantially, to the effect that many Armenians prefer to send their children to Russian instead of Armenian schools. According to the newspaper

“Hamšen” (Sukhum, No 6, 2003), the total number of pupils in Armenian schools has become less than three thousand, and each year this number reduces. For example, in 2003, the Gagra Armenian School No. 3 counted only 135 pupils, whereas in the Russian school in Gagra, which had 757 pupils, 39 % were ethnic Armenians.

The major part of Armenians in Abkhazia are followers of Armenian Apostolic Church, while a minority, mainly the Artvin Armenians, are Catholics. Nowadays, a Polish priest from Sochi comes every fortnight to Gagra and Sukhum to conduct the Catholic service (in the Russian language), whereas the Gregorian Armenians attend the Russian or Abkhaz orthodox churches. Armenians are strictly exogamous, again with the exception of Artvin Armenians, who, at least in the past, allowed marriages between cousins (Catholics with first cousins and Gregorians with second cousins). On the other hand, the Armenians are characterized by ethnic endogamy, preferring Armenian marriage partners. The majority of mixed families used to be with Russians, somewhat less with Georgians, and very few with Abkhazians, although nowadays the number of Abkhaz-Armenian marriages tends to grow. In most mixed families, children learn the languages of both parents. The Armenians have a very stable ethnic identity and are keen to preserve their language and religion. The families are traditionally large compared with other population groups in Abkhazia.

### 5. The Armenian groups in Abkhazia

The major part of Armenians in Abkhazia identify themselves as the “Hamshen Armenians” (Arm *hamšen-ci*); their total number is estimated at present at some 50,000 (cf. Torlakjan 2002: 5). In Russian they are called *амшенские армяне*, the local Artvin Armenians refer to them by the term *yetšeci*, while the Abkhazians call all Armenians by a common term *ayerman(a)* (< Tu *ermene*)<sup>3</sup>. The three subgroups within this larger community are Ordu (Arm *ord(i)e-ci*), Dzhank (jēnik<sup>h</sup>-ci) and Trabzon (t<sup>h</sup>irabizon-ci), these self-designations being derived from the cities of Ordu, Dzhank (Samsun) and Trabzon in north-eastern Turkey. Besides, there are Artvin Armenians, who do not identify themselves as the *Hamshentsi* and who speak an Eastern Armenian dialect. There are also other very small groups

<sup>3</sup> The Turkish Abkhazians call their Muslim Hamshen neighbours by the term *amš'ərə*, a derivation of Tu *hemşinli*.

from Erzurum, Kars, Alashkert and some other places in Turkey, probably comprising 5 to 8 per cent of all Abkhazia Armenians and representing later immigrants. Finally, there are many families from Armenia proper (from Yerevan, Kirovakan/Vanajor, Spitak), from Tbilisi, Akhalkalaki, Karabakh (the most recent group) and elsewhere.

The Armenian vernacular is the language of the family, and it is spoken when Armenians meet on the streets of the city or at the marketplace. Some old(er) people have retained the knowledge of Turkish. The Hamshen and Artvin speakers, if they talk in their own vernaculars, due to the differences in phonology and morphology, can understand each other with difficulty. Lexical differences can be demonstrated by an example of the expression 'it rains' in various forms of Armenian spoken in Abkhazia:

SEA	Dzh	O	Tr
<i>anjrew ē galis</i>	<i>vəraik<sup>h</sup> k.uk.a</i>	<i>vəraayeg gənæ</i>	<i>t<sup>h</sup>at<sup>h</sup>av k.uk.a//g<sub>ə</sub>ne</i>

The distribution of various Armenian dialects in Abkhazia is as follows. The Ord(i)etsi speakers live in such villages as Atara Armjanskaja, Labra, Arakič of the Očamčyra region, Mtsara (Arm *mejara*) of the Gudauta region and in the cities of Sukhum, Gagra, Gudauta, Novyj Afon and Očamčyra. The speakers of Dzhanik (*jenik<sup>h</sup>-ci*) live in the villages of Psou, Ačmarda, Kazarma, Hašpsy, Aibga, Xolodnaja Rečka, the city of Gagra in the Gagra region, in the village of Mtsara of the Gudauta region, in the village of Psyrdzkha (Primorskoe) in Novyj Afon, in the village of Jaštux of the Sukhum region, in the village of Arakič of the Očamčyra region, and in the village of Tsebeljda (Abx *c'abal* > Arm *ǰæbel*) of the Gulrypš region. The Trabzon dialect was spoken by the original Armenian inhabitants of the regions of Trabzond, Bayburt, Gümüşhane and Giresun in Turkey. The migrants from these cities have established themselves in the cities of Batumi, Poti, Sevastopol', Yalta, Kerch and in Abkhazia. In Abkhazia, the Trabzon speakers can be found in the villages of Ešera, Upper Jaštukh near Sukhum (called Burdzh (*burǰ*)), reportedly after their place of origin in Turkey near Trebizond), Gumsta of the Sukhum region, in the villages of Gulrypš, Mačara, Pšap, Marxjaul, Šaumjanovka, Ganaxleba, Mjasnikovo of the Gulrypš region, *k<sup>h</sup>ark.ud k.ey* ("The Stone Heap Village") of the Gagra region, and in the cities of Gagra, Sukhum and Očamčyra.

## 6. West Armenian: the Northern Hamshen dialects

The three “Hamshen” groups in Abkhazia are very close both culturally and linguistically. Their vocabularies are characterized by many Turkish loanwords, and they include also many Russian words borrowed already in the Caucasus. Some authors regard the Ordu speech as representing the original Hamshen dialect in its pure form (Minasjan 1996: 6). There is a certain level of inter-dialect mix, stimulated by close contacts of the three groups and common inter-marriages. Besides, within the milieu of those who finished Armenian schools and higher educational establishments in the Armenian language, a certain influence of Standard East Armenian is also noticeable, mainly in the vocabulary. I shall characterize the phonetic and morphological features of the three Hamshen groups together, showing common features and noting the specific differences.

### 6.1 Vowels

The “Hamshen” vocalic system, as described by Ačaryan (Adjarian 1909: 59), includes the following phonemes: *a, e, ə, i, o, u, ü*, and is probably typical for the Eastern group. In our three dialects, which represent the Northern Hamshen speech (Dzhanik, Ordu, Trabzon), the vocalic inventory is as follows: *a, æ (= ä), e, ə, i, o, u*. The difference is thus the lack of the front *ü* in the northern dialects and the lack of *æ* in the eastern ones. The most important common Northern Hamshen (NH) vocalic features are:

a. The old *a* becomes *o* before nasals (a feature shared by other Hamshen groups):

- SEA *beran* vs. Dzh *p.eron* ‘mouth’  
 SEA *k<sup>h</sup>san* vs. O *k<sup>h</sup>son* ‘twenty’  
 SEA *k<sup>h</sup>ami* vs. O, Tr *k<sup>h</sup>omi* ‘wind’, etc.

The same happens also with Turkish loans: Dzh *yurbon* ‘sacrifice’ < Tu *qurban*, O *č<sup>h</sup>obon* ‘shepherd’ < Tu *çoban*, etc., which indicates that the shift was a relatively recent process. The rule does not seem to be applied in the case of the numeral ‘seventy’: SEA, Artv *yot<sup>h</sup>anasun*, cf. Tr *yot<sup>h</sup>anasun*, Dzh *yot.ənasun*, O *yot.nasun*. On polysyllables containing the internal sequence *-an-* in Hamshen see Acharian (1947: 23).

## b. Diphthongs &gt; monophthongs:

	SEA		NH	
<i>ay</i> > <i>e</i> :	<i>ayd</i>	vs.	<i>ed</i>	'that one'
	<i>aysp.es</i>	vs.	<i>esp<sup>h</sup>es</i>	'thus, this way'
<i>uy</i> > <i>u</i> :	<i>morak<sup>h</sup>uyr</i>	vs.	<i>mork<sup>h</sup>ur</i>	'maternal aunt'
	<i>horak<sup>h</sup>uyr</i>	vs.	<i>hork<sup>h</sup>ur</i>	'paternal aunt'
<i>yu</i> > <i>u</i> :	<i>haryur</i>	vs.	<i>harur</i>	'hundred'

c. In Dzhanik the Umlaut process is visible on a somewhat greater scale than in Ordu and Trabzon:

SEA		Dzh	O	
<i>č<sup>h</sup>ors</i>	–	<i>č<sup>h</sup>eys</i>	<i>č<sup>h</sup>oys</i>	'four'
<i>k<sup>h</sup>san</i>	–	<i>k<sup>h</sup>sen</i>	<i>k<sup>h</sup>son</i>	'twenty'.

d. The combination of the nasal with the voiced velar produces phonetically a nasal velar [ŋ]: O *hing* [hiŋ<sup>kh</sup>] 'five' (the velar off-set is starting with a voiced element and ends with the voiceless release).

## 6.2 Consonants

Despite their geographic proximity, the Northern Hamshen dialects display three different systems in respect to correspondences in Classical Armenian (CA) consonants. Although in Ordu and Trabzon the stops and affricates have a binary distinction of voiced vs. voiceless aspirated, the Trabzon system evolved in line with Ačaryan's description of the development of the "Hamshen" consonants: "only voiced and voiceless aspirated are preserved; the voiced and simple voiceless of the Classical Armenian are both represented by the voiced; the aspirated voiceless remain without change" (Adjarian 1909: 59); in Kortlandt's (1978: 10) classification, this is type 22 system, whereas the Ordu system is the result of the transformation of the voiceless unaspirated into the voiced ones and the merger of voiced and voiceless aspirated in the latter series (Kortlandt's type 20).<sup>4</sup>

Unlike these two dialects, Dzhanik has a ternary system of stops and affricates: voiced, voiceless aspirated and voiceless unaspirated. The latter

<sup>4</sup> My informant from Gagra who claims to be an Ordu speaker has a ternary consonant system identical to that of Dzhanik, but it is unclear whether this is not the result of some Dzhanik intermixture/influence; obviously, more research into the Ordu speech is needed.





h. Consonants are phonetically palatalized after front vowels:

Dzh	<i>xnjer</i>	[χ <sup>n</sup> ndzer <sup>y</sup> ]	'apple'
Dzh	<i>axp.ær</i>	[aχ <sup>p</sup> ʔær <sup>y</sup> ]	'brother'
O, Tr	<i>ergus</i>	[er <sup>y</sup> ʔgus]	'two'
Tr	<i>irek<sup>h</sup></i>	[i <sup>r</sup> ʔek <sup>hy</sup> ]	'three'
Tr	<i>meg</i>	[mek <sup>hy</sup> ]	'one'

i. In the numeral *vat<sup>h</sup>sun* 'sixty' the combination /t<sup>h</sup>s/ is realized phonetically either as [t:s], or as [ts:]: [vat:sun//vats:un], i.e. with the geminated stop or affricate. The geminated affricate is heard also in the numeral 'six': O, Tr *vec* [vets:]. In Dzhanik, in *yot.ə* 'seven' and *ut.ə* 'eight', /t./ is pronounced with a slight gemination.

j. In Ordu, when *k<sup>h</sup>son* 'twenty' is counted with the following numerals, it loses the initial *k<sup>h</sup>*:-

SEA	Dzh	O	
<i>k<sup>h</sup>san mek.</i>	<i>k<sup>h</sup>senə mek</i>	<i>sonə mek</i>	'twenty one'

### 6.3 Morphology

Among morphological peculiarities the following features can be mentioned (cf. Adjarian 1909: 59):

a. The infinitive has a suffix *-uš*, unlike *-el* in the other dialects:

SEA	NH	
<i>k<sup>h</sup>ayl-el</i>	vs.	<i>k<sup>h</sup>æl-uš</i> 'to go'
<i>p<sup>h</sup>č<sup>h</sup>-el</i>	vs.	<i>p<sup>h</sup>əč<sup>h</sup>-uš</i> 'to blow'
<i>xos-el</i>	vs.	<i>xos-uš</i> 'to speak'

b. The verbs with an initial vowel form their Present Indicative and Imperfect by means of the prefix *gu-*, otherwise with the suffix *-gu*, cf. Tr *yes* g[\*u]-uz-im 'I want' vs. *yes ber-im-gu* 'I (shall) bring, carry'.

c. The ablative is formed, as in Artvin and Tiflis, by means of the suffix *-men*: *ənuč-men už+ey e* 'them-of strong-is = is stronger than them'.

#### 6.4 Lexicon

The Hamshen dialects contain loanwords of Turkish, Persian, Arabic, Georgian, Laz, and Greek origin. On the other hand, Hamshen influenced the local Turkish dialects, which assimilated many items of their local culture, flora and cuisine (see Bläsing 1992; 1995).

Examples of Turkish loans in Northern Hamshen are:

<i>ak<sup>h</sup>rep</i>	‘scorpion’ (Dzh <i>garij</i> )	<i>daha</i>	‘more’
<i>ama</i>	‘but’	<i>gene</i>	‘again’
<i>bi<sup>h</sup>un</i>	‘all’	<i>hayda</i>	‘go!’
<i>bost<sup>h</sup>an</i>	‘cucumber’	<i>haman</i>	‘at once’
<i>buldurčik<sup>h</sup></i>	(Tr) ‘quail’ (O, Dzh <i>ler</i> ) <sup>5</sup>	<i>lazut</i> (Dzh <i>lazd</i> )	‘maize’
<i>č<sup>h</sup>abux</i>	‘quickly’	<i>vaxt<sup>h</sup></i>	‘time’, etc.

There are also some cultural words shared with Laz (cf. Vaux 2001), some Georgian words (e.g. Tr *aba* question particle), and some older Russian loans, such as Tr *droga* ‘perch’ < Rus *дроза* (‘in the waggon’).

Sometimes archaic Classical Armenian forms have been preserved in the Hamshen varieties, as opposed to the innovative forms in Standard Armenian, cf. CA *mek<sup>h</sup>*, SEA *menk<sup>h</sup>*, Artv, Tr, O *menk<sup>h</sup>*, as opposed to Dzh *mek<sup>h</sup>* ‘we’.

The numeral ‘seven’ has in Ordu two forms: *yot.a* and *oxt.a*.

#### 7. East Armenian: Artvin

The Artvin Armenians originate from the city of Artvin and its environs in the north-east of Turkey. A considerable part of Artvin province is covered with steep mountains, divided into two sections by the Çoruh River. It has the cities of Kars at the north-west, Erzurum at the south and south-east, Rize at the west, the Black Sea at the north and the Georgian border at the north-east. Beside the *central district* (Tu *merkez*), the province includes seven other districts, namely Ardanuç, Arhavi, Borçka, Hopa, Murgul, Şavşat and Yusufeli. Some of the local subdivisions are still remembered by my informants: *ardanğeci* (from the city of Ardanuç), *korjulci* (from the village of *korjul*), *şavşe(t)ci* (from the district of Şavşat), *xot’orğurci* (from a place called *xot’orğur* on the right bank of the Çoruh River), etc.

More than half of all Artvin Armenians are Armenian Catholics, and regard the Pope as their spiritual leader, while a somewhat smaller

<sup>5</sup> Ačařyan (1947: 232) gives two “Hamshen” forms: *leor* [lör] and *ler*.

part (some 45%) belong to the Gregorian (Armenian Apostolic) Church. The Armenian Catholic Diocese of Artvin (*Artuinensis Armenorum*) was established in 1850 by Pope Pius IX for Catholic Armenians in that part of the Ottoman Empire and in neighbouring southern Russia.<sup>6</sup> The Catholic Artvinians used to form a rather close group, living a segregated endogamic way of life and not mixing with the other Armenian groups, including the Gregorian Artvinians. Such traditional attitudes are reflected in the term by which the Hamshen Armenians (*Artv yemšeci*) are referred to by the Artvinians: *geyacik* 'peasants', while all non-Artvin Armenians are called by them *daseci mart'-a* 'the stranger'.

The first Artvin Armenians, according to my informants, came to Abkhazia between 1905 and 1909. Today Artvin families can be found in the cities of Gagra (ca. 60 families), Gudauta and Sukhum. Outside Abkhazia, there are small Artvin communities in Čerkessk (formerly Batalpašinsk), Labinsk, Krasnodar, Novorossijsk, Apšeronok, Yalta and Taganrog. The traditional occupation of Catholic Artvin Armenians was trade, while Gregorians specialized in small crafts, such as shoe-making.

In Turkey, Artvin was spoken in the cities of Artvin, Ardahan, Ardanuç and Olti. According to Acharjan (Adjarian 1907: 84), the Artvin dialect occupies an intermediate position between the dialects of Erzurum, Tiflis and Xoy. The following is a brief account of the peculiarities of this little-known Eastern Armenian dialect.

### 7.1 Vowels

The Artvin vocalic system is as follows: *a, e, ə, i, o, u*. The most important vocalic features are:

a. Diphthongs became monophthongs (Adjarian 1909: 85):

	CA		Artv	
<i>ay &gt; e</i> :	<i>ayd</i>	>	<i>ed</i>	'here'
	<i>ayn</i>	>	<i>en</i>	'there'

b. The syncope of the penultimate vowel in the structure CVCVC + (C)V...:<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Cf. [http://www.katolsk.no/utenriks/kronologi/orient\\_armenian\\_artvin.htm](http://www.katolsk.no/utenriks/kronologi/orient_armenian_artvin.htm).

<sup>7</sup> This syncope resembles a similar phenomenon in the neighbouring Georgian: *k'ak'al-i* 'walnut' vs. *k'ak'l-is xe* 'the walnut tree', *bazar-i* 'market' vs. *bazr-is paseb-i* 'the market prices' (where *-is* is the genitive suffix), but it is also found in other Armenian dialects, e.g., Erzurum, Tiflis *k<sup>h</sup>ayak<sup>h</sup>* 'city', gen. *k<sup>h</sup>ayak<sup>h</sup>-i* (H. Martirosyan, p.c.).

<i>k'ak'al</i> 'walnut'	–	<i>k'ak'li c'ar</i>	'walnut-tree'
<i>t<sup>h</sup>ixil</i> 'hazel-nut'	–	<i>t<sup>h</sup>ixli c'ar</i>	'hazel-nut tree'
<i>bazar</i> 'market', <i>ert<sup>h</sup>-al</i> 'go'	–	<i>ye ert<sup>h</sup>-lis im bazr-um-u</i>	'I go to the market'

## 7.2 Consonants

The Artvin phonetic system is similar to that of Tiflis: a ternary system of stops and affricates: voiced, voiceless glottalized and voiceless aspirated. The same system is of course typical for Georgian, Laz and the majority of the other Caucasian languages.

### 7.2.1 The phonetic realization of consonants and their combinations

- Glottalization and aspiration are not strong, unless under emphasis.
- The rhotic resonant is voiceless at the end of the word: *xəyar* [-ɾ] 'cucumber'.
- There are cases in which final *-s* is lost:

SEA		Artv	
<i>yes</i>	vs.	<i>ye</i>	'I' (e.g. <i>ye mən-a-lis im</i> 'I am staying')
<i>ays</i>	vs.	<i>e</i>	'this' (e.g. <i>e t'un-ə</i> 'this house'), etc.

- In the speech of some speakers the root *ert<sup>h</sup>-* 'to go' loses its rhotic in the conjugation: *et<sup>h</sup>-lis e* 'he is going', *ye et<sup>h</sup>-lis im* 'I am going' (for which another informant has *ye ert<sup>h</sup>-lis im*), but *ye uze-lis im ert<sup>h</sup>-al* 'I want to go'.

## 7.3 Morphology

In morphology some noteworthy features are (cf. Adjarian 1909: 85):

- Ablative in *-men*, as in Tiflis and Hamshen, as contrasted with the SEA in *-ic*; e.g. *nəmanc-men* 'from them';
- The present progressive in *-lis*, as in Karabakh and Maragha: *ye ber-e-lis im* 'I am carrying';
- The future with prefixal *k'u*: *ye k'u-ber-im* 'I shall bring'.

## 7.4 Lexicon

Beside native words, Artvin borrowed Turkish, Persian, Arabic, Greek, Laz and Georgian words. After Tiflis, it is probably the Armenian dialect

which was the most heavily influenced by Georgian. To name only a few Georgian words:

<i>aba</i>	question particle ( <i>aba inč</i> 'and what?')	<i>gogó/go</i>	'girl'
<i>at'am</i>	'peach'	<i>k'ak'al</i>	'walnut'
<i>bizá</i>	'uncle'	<i>p'ep'elak<sup>h</sup></i>	'butterfly'
<i>da</i>	conjunction 'and'	<i>t<sup>h</sup>ixil</i>	'hazelnut'
<i>dedá</i>	'mother'		

Loanwords from Turkish (or from Arabic and Persian via Turkish) are also abundant:

<i>babá</i>	'father'	<i>t<sup>h</sup>erep<sup>h</sup></i>	'side'
<i>bi<sup>h</sup>un</i>	'all'	<i>t<sup>h</sup>axt<sup>h</sup>abit<sup>h</sup></i>	'bed-bug'
<i>k'ayiy</i>	'boat with flat bottom'	<i>xayar</i>	'cucumber'
<i>p<sup>h</sup>enjera</i>	'window'		

### 8. Onomasticon

Personal names of Abkhazian Armenians are of Armenian, Iranian, or, more rarely Turkish and Arabic origin.

**Male:** Andranik, Arakel, Aram, Ardaš, Aršak, Artak, Artavazd, Artin, Artuš, Ašot, Avetis, Aykaz, Azad, Boghos, Dikran, Galust, Gevorg, Hakop, Hamayak, Hambartsum, Hrant, Grigor, Harut(yun), Išxan, Karapet, Melik, Misak, Ovanes, Petros, Rafik, Samvel, Sarkis, Smbat, Sedrak, Vagharšak, Vazgen, Xačik, Zadyk, Zorik.

**Female:** Anahid(a), Anuš, Arewaluys, Astghik, Gayane, Geganuš, Gohar, Haykanuš, Hripsima, Knarik, Maro, Nanegyul, Pekruhi, Satenik, Seda, Šamiram, Šoghakat, Siranuš, Siruš, Xatun.

### 9. Conclusions

The Armenian dialects spoken in Abkhazia, though showing a considerable level of resilience and vitality, nevertheless are gradually given up in favour of Russian, which process has been accelerated due to the break-up of traditional links with Armenia after the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Universal education in Armenian schools in Abkhazia is conducted in Standard East Armenian, which is another factor weakening the position of the vernacular, left to be used only in the family circle.

We are thus probably dealing with a slowly vanishing cultural-linguistic community, which necessitates efforts to fully document the Armenian dialects of Abkhazia and the adjoining areas of the Krasnodar region of Russia. The speech of these particular groups is especially significant for the history of Armenian in view of the fact that they preserve the little known Armenian dialects much in the way as they were spoken in their original homeland in Turkey some 130 years ago, without any later influence of Turkish.

Turkish influenced strongly both Hamshen and Artvin groups, which is mostly visible in lexicon, but also probably in other aspects of their language, though this question remains so far unstudied. Besides, a factor common to all these dialects was the contact with Pontic Greek and with Kartvelian languages (Laz or Georgian). In particular, there are certain similarities in Laz and Hamshen phonetics. Thus, Laz glottalized consonants can be pronounced as voiceless stops or affricates, in the manner they are pronounced in Hamshen. Another common feature is the weakness of *r*: in Hamshen in certain clusters it turns into *y*, and in Laz in clusters and intervocalically it can turn into zero, cf. Dzh *k<sup>h</sup>ur* 'sister' vs. *im k<sup>h</sup>uys* 'my sister', Laz *imxos* < *imxors* 'he eats', *k'ibii* < *k'ibiri* 'tooth'. Further study is needed to investigate the contact-induced phenomena in Hamshen and its interaction with the neighbouring languages from an areal perspective.

There is yet another aspect, which is of undoubted historical interest: the Hamshen and Artvin Armenians might have preserved in their language and toponymy some substrate features of the tongues which were previously spoken in the areas of north-eastern Anatolia. We do not know which languages were spoken by Chalybians, Tibarenians, Carduchians, Taochians, Chaldaeans, Tzanians, Colchians, Macrones, Drilae, Mossynoecians and other ancient tribes indigenous to what is now north-eastern Turkey and mentioned by such classical authors as Herodotus, Strabo and Xenophon. It is assumed that the Hamshen Armenians arrived to their present habitat in the area of Çamlıhemşin of north-eastern Turkey in the second half of the 8<sup>th</sup> century, originating from the Ayrarat area (Xaçikjan 2002: 19). These newcomers might have come in close contact with or even have assimilated the language(s) of the older populations of the area. As noted in this connection by Ačařyan (1947: 191-192), those words and place names in Hamshen that are not from any known language (such as Turkish, Greek, or Laz) are probably from the lost Pontic language (Pontic borrowings).<sup>8</sup> The lexicon of Hamshen and Artvin Armenians might thus

<sup>8</sup> Cf. the list of 34 such substrate place names in Ačařyan (1947: 192; H. Martirosyan, p.c.).

shed some light on the ancient ethno-linguistic situation of north-eastern Asia Minor, which has always been linguistically and culturally at the crossroads of civilizations, languages and cultures.

*Leiden University*

#### ABBREVIATIONS

Abx	Abkhazian	NH	Northern Hamshen
Arm	Armenian	O	Ordu dialect
Artv	Artvin dialect	Rus	Russian
CA	Classical Armenian	SEA	Standard East Armenian
Dzh	Dzhanik dialect	Tr	Trabzon dialect
H	Hamshen dialect	Tu	Turkish

#### REFERENCES

- Adjarian, H.  
1909 *Classification des dialectes arméniens*. Paris: Librairie Honoré Champion.  
1947 [Ačařyan, H.] *K<sup>h</sup>mmut<sup>h</sup>yun Hamšeni barbari*. Yerevan: Academy Press.
- Bläsing, U.  
1992 *Armenisches Lehngut im Türkkeitürkischen am Beispiel vom Hemşin*. Amsterdam: Rodopi.  
1995 *Armenisch-Türkisch. Etymologische Betrachtungen ausgehend von Materialien aus dem Hemşingebiet nebst einigen Anmerkungen zum Armenischen insbesondere dem Hemşindialekt*. Amsterdam: Rodopi.
- Dzidzarija, G.  
1982 *Maxadžirsoto i problemy istorii Abxazii XIX stoletija*. Suxumi: Alašara.
- Kortlandt, F.  
1978 "Notes on Armenian historical phonology II (The Second Consonant Shift)". *Studia Caucasica* 4, 9-16.
- Kuznetsov, I.V.  
2002 "Xemşily i amşenskie armiane v kul'turnom kontekste Ponta" [The Khemshils and the Hamshen Armenians in the Cultural Context of the Pontus]. In: *Torlakjan 2002*, 129-193.
- Minasjan, M.G.  
1996 *Armjane Pričernomorja. Čast' pervaja. Armjane v Amšene*. Gagra.
- Mouradian, C.  
2001 "Aperçu sur l'islamisation des Arméniens dans l'Empire ottoman: le cas des *Hamčentsi/Hemşili*". In: *Islamic Conversions. Religious Identities in Mediterranean Islam*. Directed by Mercedes García-Arenal. Maisonneuve et Larose, European Science Foundation, 399-418.



- Torlakjan, B.  
2002 *Etnografija amšenskix armjan. Sbornik statej i materialov. – Amšenskaja biblioteka no. 1.* Krasnodar: "Amshen".
- Vaux, B.  
1999 *The phonology of Armenian.* Oxford: Clarendon Press.  
2001 "Hemshinli: the forgotten Black Sea Armenians". *Journal of Armenian Studies* 6/2, 47-71.
- Weitenberg, J.J.S.  
2002 "Aspects of Armenian dialectology". In: J. Berns & J. van Marle (eds). *Present-day Dialectology. Problems and Findings* (Trends in Linguistics. Studies and Monographs 137), 141-157. Berlin, New York: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Xačikjan, L.  
2002 "Stranicy istorii amšenskix armjan". In: Torlakjan 2002, 18-30.

