

PEOPLES OF THE CAUCASUS



The Abkhazians Hewitt

The Аҧсуаа  
**Abkhazians**

edited by  
**George Hewitt**

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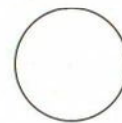
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PEOPLES OF THE CAUCASUS

# The *Аԥсуаа* Abkhazians a handbook

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**George Hewitt**



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CAUCASUS WORLD

noble deer, the roe-deer and chamois. Wild boar are very common.

From the representative reptiles and amphibians one can single out the Caucasian viper (*Viper kaznakowi*), endemic to the Caucasus, the Aesculapian grass-snake (*Elaphe longissima*), the Mediterranean tortoise (*Testudo graeca*), the grey toad (*Bufo bufo verrucosissima*). This last represents a sub-species of the grey toad, the largest of the species over the whole area of its habitat.

In the mountain rivers of Abkhazia the most widespread fish is the river-trout (*Salmo trutta*), which is a freshwater variety of the Black Sea salmon. In the marshy lakes on the coastal depressions the most common is the sazan and the crucian (carp), whilst in the rivers of the eastern part of Abkhazia one finds the sheat-fish.

From the comparatively variegated insect fauna one can mention two relic species of large predatory beetle, *Carabus caucasicus* and *Brama ledereri*, which inhabit the coastal forests of Abkhazia's south-eastern region.

The protected nature-reserves of Abkhazia are represented by two reserves and one national park — the Pitsunda-Mysra and the Pskhu-Gumista (Psh<sup>w</sup>y-G<sup>w</sup>msta) reserves and the Rits'a relic national park. The general area of all the protected lands consists of 82,000 hectares or about ten per cent of the territory of the country.

The war of 1992-93 led to the laying of a large number of mines, especially in the south-east of the republic, which remain to the present day (early 1998). Sukhum's renowned Institute of Experimental Pathology and Therapy, based on the Ape Nursery, a great tourist attraction, was destroyed and the apes let loose. Many trees were cut down for fuel, and, with a severe blockade imposed by Russia from early 1996 in response to requests for pressure on Abkhazia from Georgia, this destruction can be expected to continue. A community so reduced to fighting for its very survival has little time and resources to preserving its environment.

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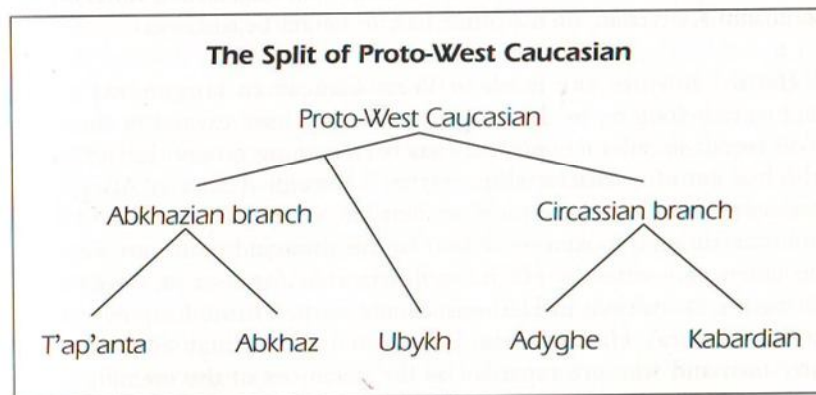
# The origin of the Abkhazian people

Vjacheslav Chirikba

The ethnogenesis of any people is a complex problem, which may be tackled by marshalling evidence from a variety of such disciplines as linguistics, archaeology, anthropology, etc. Below I shall deal, somewhat briefly, with the first two of these, the linguistic and archaeological record proving crucial in the search for the origin of the Abkhazian people.

### Proto-West Caucasian

The common ancestor of the modern Abkhazo-Adyghean languages, Proto-West Caucasian, can be dated approximately to the third millennium BC. At the final stage of its development it split into at least three dialects: Proto-Circassian, Proto-Abkhaz, and Proto-Ubykh. Though Ubykh linguistically occupies an intermediate position between Abkhaz and Circassian, some features indicate that originally it was closer to Abkhaz, only later undergoing substantial Circassian influence. One may, therefore, suppose that initially Proto-West Caucasian was divided into Proto-Circassian and Proto-Abkhaz-Ubykh dialects, later splitting into Proto-Abkhaz and Proto-Ubykh:



An analysis of the common Abkhazo-Adyghean lexicon allows one to speculate on the economic activities of the distant Abkhazo-Adyghean ancestors: they grew different plants (apples, pears, plums, figs, nuts) and cereals (including different sorts of millet), bred cattle, sheep, goats, swine, horses, donkeys, and were hunting and fishing; they developed crafts such as weaving, spinning, metal-working (in copper, lead, silver, gold); they had a rich religious cult, worshipping *inter alios* gods of the smithy (*Shaf<sup>wy</sup>* = Circassian *lap<sup>ly</sup>*) and thunder and lightning (*Afy* = Circassian *ly(-)ble*) (Chirikba, 1986, pp 397-401).

### External connections of the West Caucasian languages

**1. East Caucasian** On the basis of research by such scholars as Trubetzkoy (1922; 1930), Dumézil (1932; 1933), Balkarov (1964; 1966), Shagirov (1977), Abdokov (1976; 1981; 1983), and Nikolaev & Starostin (1994; cf. also Starostin 1985), I am personally convinced that the West Caucasian languages cannot be separated genetically from the East Caucasian languages. Abdokov and Nikolaev with Starostin have proposed patterns of regular sound-correspondences between the East and West Caucasian languages, publishing etymological dictionaries of the North Caucasian linguistic family. Their works provide to my satisfaction the final proof for the existence of a compact North Caucasian linguistic family with two branches: Western (or Abkhazo-Adyghean) and Eastern (or Nakh-Daghestanian, containing the Nakh group, consisting of Chechen, Ingush and Bats, plus the Daghestanian group, with some 26 languages such as Avar, Lezgi, Lak, Dargwa, Tabasaran, etc). The term 'North Caucasian languages' is to some extent relative, as several members of this family are spoken in Transcaucasia (e.g. Abkhaz, Bats, Udi). The term 'Ibero-Caucasian languages', traditional in Soviet Caucasology, which presupposed a genetic relationship between both branches of North Caucasian, on the one hand, and Kartvelian, on the other, can no longer be sustained.

**2. Hattic** Besides the modern West Caucasian languages, other languages belonging to the same group might have existed in the past. Over recent decades a hypothesis has been gaining ground according to which a genetic relationship existed between Abkhazo-Adyghean languages and Hattic, the most ancient known language of Asia Minor (modern Turkey), spoken some four to five thousand years ago. Texts in this language, written by Hittite scribes in cuneiform script, were found during the excavations in Hattusas, capital of the Hittite Empire (east of modern Ankara). Hattians, who had created quite a high civilisation of their own and who are regarded as the inventors of the metallurgy of

iron, had made a substantial impact on the social organisation and religious system of the kingdom of the Indo-European speaking Hittites.

The very first investigator of Hattic, E. Forrer (1919, pp 1033-34), established its non-Indo-European character and suggested its relationship with Abkhazo-Adyghean languages. The same view was proposed at roughly the same time by Bleichsteiner (1923). The main reasons were striking structural similarities (particularly, extensive use of prefixation) between this ancient language of Asia Minor, extinct since the early second millennium BC, and the languages of the West Caucasian group. These structural affinities were later discussed by Dunaevskaja (1960), Diakonov (1967) and Ardzinba (1979). These latter two also noted some material correspondences (in affixes) between Hattic and West Caucasian. Ivanov (1985) proposed many Hattic-West Caucasian material parallels, both in radical and affixal morphemes. Though not all these comparisons are equally convincing (largely because of the poor preservation of Hattic), Ivanov did in general manage to demonstrate the existence of this relationship. Hattic-West Caucasian similarities in lexicon and grammar have been further investigated by Braun (1994), Taracha (1995) and Chirikba (1996, pp 406-32).

It has been suggested that Hattic was related to the language of the Kaskians, the warlike tribes inhabiting the vast mountainous territories to the north of the Hattians in the Anatolian Black Sea coastal area. The union of the Kaskian tribes was a rather formidable power which caused much strife for the neighbouring Hittite kingdom, whose rulers had tenaciously to fight the turbulent mountaineers until the very end of the Hittite state. At the upper reaches of the River Halys (modern-day Kızıl-irmak in northern Turkey) Kaskians founded the powerful state of Kasku.

Analysis of Kaskian personal names and toponyms allowed Giorgadze (1961, pp 209-10) to postulate their linguistic relationship to Hattic (cf. also Melikishvili 1960, p9; Diakonov 1968, p12). One of the tribes known to be in the Kaskian tribal union were the Abeshla, whose name in some contemporary sources (e.g. Assyrian texts of the 12th century BC) was given as a synonym for Kaskians (cf. Inal-Ipa 1976, p129). It has been suggested that the name Kashka (Hittite *Kashkash*, Assyrian *Kashka*, Egyptian *Kshksh*) could be connected with the later designation of the Circassians (cf. tenth century Arabic *kashak*, Old Georgian *kashag-i*, Old Armenian *gashk*, Old Russian *kasogi*, Ossetic *kasog*, Byzantine Greek *κασσοχία* 'Circassia', etc). At the same time the name Abeshla resembles the later designations for the Abkhazians (Old Georgian variants *apsil-/apshil-*, Old Armenian plural form *apshet-k*,

Greek *apsilai*, Latin [*gens*] *Absilae*). These facts formed the basis for the hypothesis according to which Kashka represent the ancient ancestors of the Circassians, and Abeshla the ancestors of the Abkhazians. This would mean that already at that period Kaskians (later Circassians) and Abeshla (later Abkhazians) were separate, though closely related tribes (Melikishvili, 1960, p9; Diakonov 1968, p12; Inal-Ipa 1976, pp 122-135).

On the other hand, it is probable that the Nakh-Daghestanian languages can be linked with the ancient (extinct) Hurrian and Urartian languages, whose speakers lived some five to three thousand years ago on the territory of the Armenian plateau and adjacent areas, creating the high civilisations of Hurri and Urartu (Diakonov & Starostin, 1986).

### The origin of the Abkhazo-Adyghean peoples

There exist several hypotheses explaining the formation of the Abkhazo-Adyghean peoples (Anchabadze, 1976, pp 8-25; Inal-Ipa, 1976; Markovin, 1978, pp 283-325; Fedorov, 1983, pp 27-31, 39-41, 56, 80-84; Klimov, 1986, p52). According to one such hypothesis, these peoples were formed approximately within the territory of their modern habitat (i.e. the West Caucasus), which can be confirmed by the existence of a shared lexicon reflecting the characteristic features of the geography of the Caucasian Black Sea coast: sea, beach, big fish, (bushy) mountain, ice, snow, cold/frost, wood, fir-tree, beech, oak, cornel, chestnut, wolf, bear, etc (cf. Klimov, 1986, p52). Important support for this hypothesis is the series of West Caucasian toponyms and hydronyms interpretable only in terms of Abkhazo-Adyghean languages. On the other hand, popular native tradition indicates a more southern origin for the Abkhazo-Adygheans.

In discussing the origin of the Abkhazo-Adyghean peoples, one can address at least three important questions linked to this problem: the ethnic identity of the people belonging to the Maikop culture; the appearance in the West Caucasus of the dolmen-culture; the probable genetic link of the West Caucasian languages with Anatolian Hattic and probably also Kaskian.

The early period of the famous Maikop culture is dated to the middle of the third millennium BC. It originated on the territory of the North-Western Caucasus (around the valley of the River Kuban and its tributaries) and then spread east, up to modern Chechenia, Ingushetia and the borders of Daghestan, where it approached the area of another major Caucasian civilisation, the Kuro-Arax culture. The famous tumuli found near the Adyghe city of Maikop (which gave the culture its name) contained large quantities of gold and silver ornaments and vessels, which resemble similar finds from Asia Minor (e.g. Alaca Hüyük in north-central Anatolia, on territory most probably populated by Hattians) and

in the Middle East (Ur, southern Mesopotamia). The Maikop culture can be explained by local development, while providing evidence of intensive contacts with the ancient southern civilisations. It is noticeable that the territory of Abkhazia remained mostly outside the sphere of this culture.

The monuments of the mysterious dolmen-culture appeared about the same time as the Maikop culture developed (i.e. mid-third millennium BC). The area of this culture covers the whole Western Caucasus (Abkhazia included), but dolmens (burial stone 'houses') are unknown in Georgia, or indeed in other parts of the Caucasus, existing only in the area populated (or historically populated) by Abkhazo-Adygheans. The Russian investigator of the West Caucasian dolmens, V. Markovin, who undertook a comparative analysis of the dolmens of Eurasia, found that the earliest West Caucasian dolmens closely resemble similar monuments found in Thrace (modern European Turkey), Spain, Portugal, southern France, Sardinia, Syria, Jordan, and North Africa. According to the rather plausible conclusion of Markovin (1978, p285), the dolmen culture does not have its genetic roots in the cultures of the Kuban region and Caucasian Black Sea coast but can be regarded as an import from the south-west of Europe. As Markovin suggests, a large group of Mediterranean builders of dolmens might have migrated by sea to the Western Caucasus and settled here. Their first contacts with the local people of the Maikop culture will have been peaceful, so that both co-existed, but later, according to Markovin, the dolmen-builders may have pushed the people of Maikop eastwards, which could explain the eastward spread of this culture. Subsequently, the dolmen-people might have fallen under the cultural influence of the tribes of the Maikop and the later North Caucasian cultures, becoming assimilated by the indigenous population and adopting their language.

As to Abkhazia, the Mediterraneans were perhaps rather quickly assimilated by the proto-Abkhazians. Markovin even noticed local differences in the architectural features of the stone 'houses', which makes it possible to distinguish between the two dolmen-culture areas: north-western, which coincides with the Circassian-speaking domain, and south-eastern, now occupied by the Abkhazians. By the second millennium BC the Mediterranean dolmen-builders would have completely merged with the local Abkhazo-Adyghean tribes, for thereafter no visible population-changes are perceptible in the Western Caucasus. This allows Markovin (1978, pp 321-23) to conclude that the group of people who brought the idea of dolmens to the Western Caucasus would have been one of the major components in the formation of the Abkhazo-Adyghean ethnos.

Other authors, however, deny the imported character of dolmens

and attribute their construction exclusively to the ancestors of the Abkhazo-Adygheans. Fedorov (1983, p29) thought that Maikopians were proto-Circassians, while the dolmen-builders were ancestors of the Abkhazians. But dolmens are found in much greater numbers in the North Caucasus than in Abkhazia, and it is difficult to suppose a major Abkhazian expansion to the North Caucasus prior to the periods of the Abkhazian Kingdom and the later northward migration of the ancestors of the Abazinians (Abaza). On the other hand, the identification of the people of the Maikop culture with the ancestors of the Circassians seems quite plausible.

According to Lavrov (1960), the idea of building dolmens was brought to the Caucasus not by a group of newcomers but by West Caucasians who themselves had travelled to the Mediterranean countries, bringing home from there the idea of dolmens. Inal-Ipa (1976, pp 79-100), who is also sceptical about the notion that dolmens were built by foreigners, argued that both archaeological and ethnographic evidence undeniably points to the local population, ancestors of the Abkhazo-Adygheans, as the builders of the dolmens in Western Caucasia. The question, however, remains as to exactly how the idea of building dolmens reached the Caucasus, as it is impossible to separate the West Caucasian dolmens from contemporary parallels found in the Mediterranean.

It is noteworthy that, despite differences in opinion as to the origin of the West Caucasian dolmen-culture, most authors (Lavrov, Inal-Ipa, Markovin, Fedorov) agree that their builders must have been one of the major components in the formation of the Abkhazo-Adygheans. Note that in Northern Anatolia dolmens are unknown, which means that the idea of building them could not have been brought from there to the Caucasus.

Let us now turn to the third of the afore-mentioned themes concerned with the ethnogenesis of the Abkhazo-Adygheans — the problem of Hattic. With Hattic and probably also Kaskian being likely to represent the most ancient specimens of Abkhazo-Adyghean, two important questions arise: firstly, must Hattic be regarded as the oldest attested West Caucasian dialect, or should we rather speak in terms of a Hattic-West Caucasian unity, much as some linguists place Hittite in relation to the rest of the Indo-European languages? Secondly, was the appearance of Hattic (and Kaskian) in central and north-eastern Asia Minor due to migration from the Caucasus, or, on the contrary, did the ancestors of Abkhazo-Adyghean speakers come to inhabit West Caucasia as a result of migration from their ancient Anatolian homeland? The third possibility is that the whole area, including north-eastern Anatolia and West Caucasia, was occupied by ethnically and linguistically related

Abkhazo-Adyghean tribes, who became extinct in Anatolia but who managed to preserve themselves in the mountains of the Western Caucasus.

This last hypothesis finds some justification in the toponyms of both ancient Anatolia and western and south-western Georgia, which might contain traces of an Abkhazo-Adyghean presence. Thus, the typical West Caucasian toponymic element *\*-psy* 'water, river' is probably attested in such ancient Anatolian toponyms as *Aripsa* (city and fortress in northern Anatolia — cf. Diakonov 1968, p84); cf. also the oldest name of the River Ch'orokh in Ajaria (south-west Georgia) and north-eastern Turkey, namely *Apsara*, earlier called *Akamopsis*, and the name of the city *Apsarolis* in Byzantine Lazica (somewhere on the border between modern Ajaria and Turkey). Furthermore, the element *-psa* is also attested in such West Georgian hydronyms as *Supsa* and *Lagumpsa*.

The fact that Abkhazo-Adyghean toponyms (more specifically, hydronyms) are found not only in the Western Caucasus but also in the south (in West and South Georgia and in north-eastern Anatolia) could support the notion that at the turn of the third and second millennia BC nearly all the coastal area, approximately from modern Sinope in Turkey to Abkhazia and further to the north-west, was populated by proto-Abkhazo-Adyghean tribes (Diakonov, 1968, p13; Gordeziani, 1975, pp 8, 10; Inal-Ipa, 1976, pp 111, 117). It is quite feasible that some of these tribes might have been migrating within this vast expanse, leaving traces in the popular ethnogenetic traditions of these peoples. Thus, the fact that in the eighth century BC Kaskians were still mentioned in Assyrian sources among the peoples inhabiting Anatolia might indicate that only a part of these tribes had moved to the Caucasus, whilst the rest remained in Asia Minor, where they were subsequently assimilated by their neighbours.

Archaeological data also point to the southern connections of ancient West Caucasians, the most impressive of which are the monuments of the Maikop culture. Links with the ancient Middle Eastern civilisations are also attested by the so-called Maikop Tablet (found near Maikop), containing an undeciphered text, the writing-system of which finds some analogues in the system used in Byblos in Phoenicia (13th century BC) and in the signs of Hittite hieroglyphs or even Sumerian pictography.

#### The formation of the Abkhazian people

According to the data provided by archaeology, from as early as the dolmen-culture one can trace a cultural continuity in Abkhazia up to the times when indisputably Abkhazian tribes become known to history

thanks to the reports of Greek and Roman authors. This means that since the second millennium BC the Western Caucasus had not witnessed any significant population-changes.

In the later part of the first millennium BC and the beginning of our era the population of the Caucasian Black Sea coast was characterised by a substantial tribal diversity, as noted by contemporary Greek and Roman writers, who mention here such tribes as Heniokhs, Achaeans, Kerkets, Koraksians, San(n)igs, Missimians, and so on. It is possible that most of them represented linguistically and culturally related tribes. Though Romans and Greeks, sadly, did not record specimens of the speech of the Caucasian tribes with whom they were directly or indirectly familiar, some of the names assigned to them from the start of the modern era can certainly be identified as references to the ancient Abkhazians.

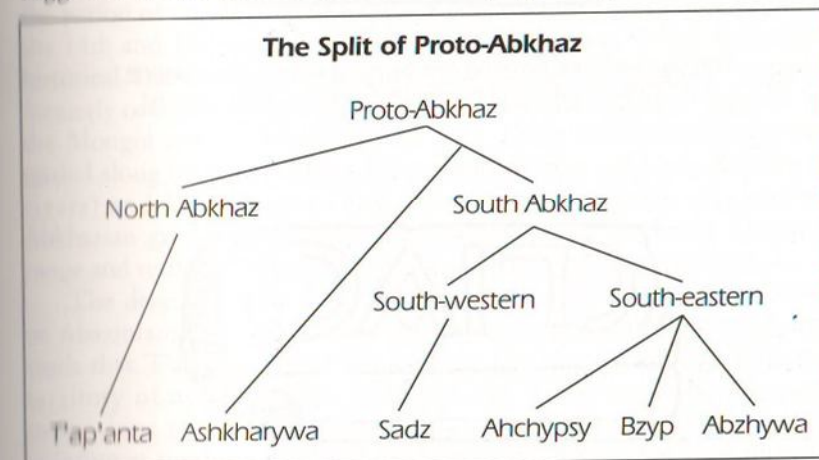
The first known mention of one of these tribes, namely the (*gens*) *Absilae* (or *Apsilae*), occurs in the *Naturalis historia* of Gaius Secundus Pliny Major (first century AD). The modern continuation of this ethnonym is the Abkhazians' self-designation *Apswa* (= '*Aps(y)-wa*'). In the second century Arrian has Greek *Apsilai*, whilst seventh century Georgian attests *apsbil-eb-i* = Armenian *apsbet-k* 'Abkhazians'. A slightly different rendition is the Old Georgian form *apsar-*, inserted into the Mariam and Machabeli manuscripts of the chronicle known as 'History and Eulogy of the Monarchs' by a scribe presumably demonstrating his erudition and knowledge of neighbouring languages. The text informs us that Queen Tamar of Georgia (1184-1213) gave her son Giorgi the second name Lasha — "which is translated," the chronicler explains, "as 'illuminator of the world' in the language of the Apsars" (in Abkhaz '*a-lasa* means 'light').

Etymologically Proto-Abkhaz *\*apca-wa* (reflecting the alveolo-palatal fricative still used in the Bzyp dialect) is probably derived from the root *\*pca* 'die' (*\*a-* being a deictic prefix, *-wa* the usual ethnic suffix) and originally meant 'mortal one/one destined to die', serving as a general designation for a human being. The designation of humans as 'mortals', common in many traditions, had in ancient times its own ideological significance: all the world was, to the archaic mentality, divided into the realms of immortal gods and mortal humans. The semantic evolution from 'mortal' to the ethnonym 'Abkhazian' can be imagined thus: 'mortal' > 'people' > 'Abkhazian people' (Chirikba 1991).

The name of the other ancient Abkhazian tribe, *Abasgoi/Abaskoi*, first attested in Arrian, is preserved in the form *Abaza*, which is the modern self-designation of the Abazinians (cf. also Turkish *abaza* 'Abkhazian(-Abazinian)', Old Armenian *avaz* and Old Russian *obézŭ* 'Abkhazian').

Conceivably the Greek plural *Abasgoi* has its source in Circassian *abaze-kbe*, plural of *abaze*, which today signifies in Circassian only 'Abazinian(s)'.

The modern name by which the Abkhazians are known in Russian and other European languages came via Georgian, where *apkhaz-i* 'Abkhazian' appears relatively late, in the Middle Ages; its original form was most probably *\*abazkb-i* (cf. Greek *Abasgoi*). The transformation of *\*abazkb-i* into *apkhaz-i* could have occurred in Mingrelian (as was suggested at the start of the 20th century by Marr), where metathesis



(transposition of sounds) is a regular phenomenon in consonant-complexes. This Mingrelianised form (with additional devoicing of *\*b* to *p* by assimilation) will have been borrowed by Georgians, who then passed it on to the Armenians (*apkhaz*), Persians (*ab/fkha:z*) and Russians (*abkhas*), whence also English acquired *Abkhaz(ian)*. It is most probable, however, that Mingrelians borrowed this term not directly from Circassian *abaze-kbe* but from Greek. One can conjecture that the Mingrelian form with *p* (from *\*b*) was borrowed before Greek beta, originally pronounced [b], was spirantised to [v], whilst the presence of a back fricative indicates that at the time in question Greek gamma, originally [g], had already been spirantised to [ɣ]. But even if the borrowing occurred after the Greek shift of [b] to [v], the cluster in the supposed Mingrelian form *\*awkhaz-i* (from *\*awazkb-i*, cf. Georgian *awangia* 'Abkhazia' in the Georgian chronicle of Juansher) could have given *apkhaz-i*.

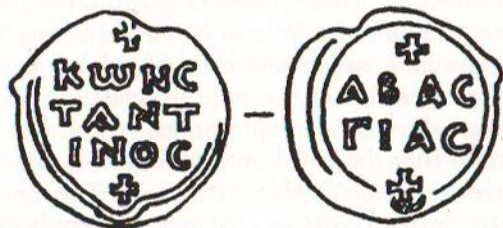
Another name known from ancient sources which also refers to an old Abkhazian tribe is the Greek *Misimianoí* 'Missimians' (sixth century Apathias). The most convincing explanation for this ethnonym, referring



Stamp on a shard carrying the name of Bishop Constantine,  
first Christian pastor of Apsilia (Ts'ibilium — sixth century)



Fragment of a flag-stone mentioning one of the rulers of Abazgia  
(from Tsandripsh — sixth century)



Pendant seal of Constantine the Abazgian  
(from Pitsunda — end of seventh-start of eighth century)

to a tribe inhabiting the mountains of ancient Abkhazia in the upper reaches of the River K'odor, derives it from the name of the dominant Abkhazian aristocratic family in that region (around modern Ts'abal/Ts'ebelda) who in later times are known as *Mar'jan-aa* 'the Marshans' (Inal-Ipa 1976, pp 233-34).

It is remarkable that the modern Abkhazian name for their country, *Apsny*, seems to be attested as early as the seventh century Armenian Geography in the form *Psinun* (Butba 1990, pp 12-13). The ancient Abkhazian tribes clearly became consolidated into a single nation during the period of the Abkhazian Kingdom (eighth-tenth centuries). Between the 14th and 15th centuries a part of the Abkhazians moved from their historical Transcaucasian homeland to the North Caucasus, into regions formerly occupied by Iranian-speaking Alans, who had been defeated by the Mongol army and had fled the area. These Abkhazian newcomers settled along tributaries of the River Kuban (Great and Little Zelenchuk rivers) and River Kuma. The move was not a single act: various Abkhazian groups at different times were crossing the Great Caucasus range and settling on its northern slopes, rich in land and pastures.

The descendants of these migrants are the present-day T'ap'antas, or Abazinians. Though in specialist literature (mainly historical) one reads that T'ap'anta Abazinians came to the North Caucasus from the territory of north-western Abkhazia and adjoining areas, there are indications (folklore, toponymical, historical and archaeological) pointing at southern Abkhazia as the starting place for at least some (if not all) of the T'ap'anta groups (Lakoba 1991, pp 120-21). Analysis of the Kartvelian (specifically, Mingrelian) loans in T'ap'anta speaks in favour of this view (Dzhonua 1992). Later, probably at the beginning of the 17th century, another group of Abkhazians migrated to the North Caucasus from Abkhazia's mountain-regions — whence their name 'Ashkharywa' (in Abkhaz *a-[xa-ry-wa* means 'mountaineer'). Some Ashkharywa speakers still call themselves *apsawa* 'Abkhazian'. To the present day the Ashkharywa dialect is much closer to Abkhaz proper than to T'ap'anta, though some features of it may be regarded as transitional between the two. Intensive contacts between T'ap'anta and Ashkharywa stimulated the process of their convergence, with overwhelming and ever growing influence of T'ap'anta, on which standard Abaza is based. Note that it was mainly Ashkharywas who migrated in the 19th century to Turkey. The mutual similarity is also strengthened by a considerable Kabardian influence on both of these North Caucasian dialects.