

**THE SOCIAL REALITY OF *ATALYCHESTVO* IN ABKHAZIA IN THE
19TH AND START OF THE 20TH CENTURY**

by

SHALVA INAL-IPA

CHAPTER I

SUCKLING-ADOPTION and ATALYK FOSTERAGE

According to Soviet ethnography, the practice of adoption -- developed in response to blood-feud, childlessness, and the acquisition of patronage -- essentially has nothing in common with *atalychestvo*. But whilst it should be clearly distinguished from the institution under investigation, it still has a certain closeness to *atalychestvo*: possibly it took shape after the pattern, and under the influence, of *atalychestvo* and so represents one of its surviving variants, i.e. a phenomenon of secondary elaboration¹. Either way, it is impossible to ignore in a work on *atalychestvo* the broader issue of adoption.

Adoption, well-known under the characteristic designation *ა.ყნ.ა.და.რა* (i.e. 'accustoming to the house' or 'familiarization') had a wide distribution in Abkhazia².

Already in 1866 A. P. Cherepov remarked that 'relations according to the practice of adoption are deemed as relations that substitute for blood-kinship'³. Adoption was indeed practised amongst these same social groups as was *atalychestvo*. Just like the latter, it had as its main practical goal the acquisition of patronage [and] of allies in civil squabbling under the conditions of feudal anarchy. People resorted to it also when a blood-feud developed, generally for the reconciliation of enemies, and also in cases of childlessness or lack of an heir.

The principal element of the rite of adoption -- i.e. the symbolic introduction of an outsider to a given family -- consisted of solemnly allowing the one invited for adoption to touch three times with his lips the breast of the mother, wife or sister of the adopter (the so-called *ა.'k'ak'a.tska.ra* 'biting of the nipples'). This was carried out as follows. During, or just before, the banquet arranged in honour of the adoption they spread out in the courtyard of the house, or in a room, a shepherd's heavy felt cloak; and sometimes on top of such a bourka they laid out a coverlet or bed-sheet. The woman, the receiving 'mother', came in here and took her seat on a little chair or trunk; she slipped over herself a long shawl from her head down to her legs, specially screening her breast with a thin silken garment (in some places termed *ა.ტაკ.ტა*). Behind, another woman stood and supported her. The man being adopted knelt in front of the adoptive

¹M.O. Kosven. '*Atalychestvo*' -- *Soviet Ethnography* . 1935, 2, pp. 41, 45, 46, 53. [N.B. all the author's citations are from works in Russian apart from those stated to be in Georgian].

²Ja.S. Smirnova is mistaken in saying that 'the Abkhazians knew three types of adoption' (*Atalychestvo* and Adoption amongst the Abkhazians in the 19th-20th centuries' -- *Soviet Ethnography* 2, 1951, p.110). In actual fact only the practice of *ა.ყნ.ა.და.რა*, which she does not entirely accurately translate as 'letting pass through the house', could have been strictly styled 'adoption'; this practice might even have been unconnected with milk-kinship. It is by the term *ა.ს.წ.ა.ფ.ა.რა* that the Abkhazians designate most of all the relations of *atalychestvo*, i.e. a real or symbolic milk-kinship and not 'adoption'. Derived from it we find *ა.ს.წ.ა.ფ.ა.რა* -- milk-kinship, real or symbolic, with a former blood-enemy.

³A.P. Cherepov. 'Notes on class- and reciprocal relations amongst the residents of the Bzyp District of Abkhazia'. TsGIA [Central State Historical Archive] of the Georgian SSR, fund OVD [?Section of Internal Affairs], act 41, pp. 20-36.

mother and thrice brought his lips in contact with her breast, repeating each time the formula 'From this day forth you are my mother'.

The duty of the other woman consisted in helping the adoptive mother first to cover her breast with muslin prior to the ceremony itself and then to reveal her face. The young folk would throw themselves on the bourka, which became the property of the first to succeed in taking possession of it. If there was no mother, wife or sister, then they restricted themselves to having the head of the household slaughter a bull for the guest and placing before him on the table the most prestigious cut of meat, namely 'the shoulder-blade' ('a.ma.xa) -- later they might also organise a 'biting of the nipples' of the wife of the one doing the adopting, should he, for example, subsequently get married. Before going home the hosts would present the adoptee and the friends accompanying him with greater or lesser gifts in conformity with the dignity of each of the guests and depending upon the property- and rank-status of the parties.

Such in essence was the nature of adoption in those circumstances when the adoptee stood higher up the social ladder by his origin than the family welcoming him into its midst.

But milk-kinship in its symbolic aspect was also encountered within one and the same social group. In this case we have grounds to speak of adoptive brotherhood, which was more prevalent among the peasants. The rite of adoptive brotherhood was accomplished as follows. Two males who belonged to different families and who had decided to contract between themselves an indissoluble bond by means of adoptive brotherhood, jointly put on a feast in the home of one of them with invitations for relatives, friends and acquaintances. The contracting brothers firmly intertwined their little fingers, and each of them thrice brought his lips in contact with the breast of his comrade's mother (if only one of the mothers remained amongst the living, then both touched her breast). Then they offered them the shoulder-blades of an animal slaughtered for the celebration, whilst they, for their part, swapped these shoulder-blades. Thereupon some elder sliced off a portion of meat from the shoulder-blade and placed half of the portion first in the mouth of the older of the contracting brothers and the second half in the mouth of the younger. After this all the meat was cut off the shoulder-blades, sliced up and distributed to those present, who consumed it. 'The one who brought you into his home and presented the shoulder-blade of the animal slaughtered in your honour ('a.ma.xa 'wəmtʰəztsʰəz) is your father, and his wife is your mother,' were the words enunciated by the company. In exceptional circumstances when, for example, there was no possibility of inviting the necessary females, the males performed the rite of adoptive brotherhood themselves by means of a mutual 'biting' of the breast. So, according to the testimony of Q'astej Arstaa (from Otxara [awattə'ra]), in the second half of the 19th century Zakari Gydzh-Ipa Otyrba and Shabat Maan, while finding themselves incarcerated in jail at Izmit in Turkey, decided

to form between themselves a bond for life and death. With this goal in mind, says the source, they stripped to the waist, and each of them touched with their lips the breast of the other, after which they deemed themselves brothers.

P'et're Ch'araia, who devoted a special article to *atalychestvo* amongst the Abkhazians, has left us a similar description of such procedures. In his words, the adopter spoke thus to his chosen one: 'I wish to take you home, to permit you to bite the breast of her who resides at home, and to receive you with all possible honour.' The adoptee arrived on the appointed day with one or two companions at the home of the adopter, bringing as a gift for the latter a horse and for the milk-mother clothing and the like. During the banquet the adopter and his relatives stand behind the table, kneel in front of the future 'а.х'wа.р'а 'ward', and give him a glass of wine to drink; then they stand up, whilst one of them, possessed of the gift of speech-making, takes up the refrain and says: 'Starting from today, we consider you to be one who has been suckled by this breast. Henceforth, we have one and the same path as you. We begrudge you nothing that we possess. And you, we trust, will likewise begrudge us nothing. We shall endeavour to set you above our other wards.' At this point they made gifts of money to the adoptee and gave some kind of reward to each of the persons who accompanied him. Such gifts were known by the term а.т'а.н.'т'а⁴. On the morning of the next day the master of the house presented animals (a buffalo, an ox, a cow) to the guest. These gifts (not including money) exceeded two- or threefold that which was supplied by the adoptee. Finally, all this ended with a ceremony possessed of great significance (although the sequence of the rites in this ceremony varied in different localities). On a cover or the bourka-cloak spread out on the ground in the courtyard they set a small chair; on that sat the head female of the household -- the future wet-nurse; and alongside stood her coevals. The adoptee entered there, knelt in front of her and thrice touched her breast with his lips, or indeed, as the Abkhazians used to say, he thrice bit the breast, repeating each time the phrase: 'From today you are to me as my natural mother!'⁵. This ceremonial symbolized the fosterage of the individual.

Concerning the significance of the right of adoption and succession for the dependent classes, the Sukhum Commission on Class and Land despatched in 1869 the following observances to the various localities:

By custom, adoption substitutes for blood-kinship; the adoptee enjoys all the rights of the natural son of the person who has adopted him, assuming this person has no natural sons. The custom does not deprive either а.х'wа.уа 'servant' or а.матс'.уа.р.'саг^w 'attendant' of the right to adopt

⁴P'et're Ch'araia translates this term as 'placing in the mouth' from а.'т'а 'mouth' and а.нтс'.а.'ра 'place [on]' and thinks that it was an accepted practice amongst the Abkhazians at a time of giving to place items in the mouth. But this is not correct, for the word derives from 'а.т'а', which means 'wooden goblet' (cf. the expression 'w.а.т'а j.а.'на.у.р' 'it is placed on your goblet').

⁵P'et're Ch'araia *Abkhazia and the Abkhazians, rearing, the reared and the rearer*, in Iveria 1888, No.173 [in Georgian].

anyone according to his choice. The adoptee inherits the property of the one who has adopted him (on condition that this latter has no sons of his own), but alongside this he also inherits the rights of the status of the adopter and the duties corresponding to that status which lie upon him, i.e. he becomes the *ა.ჯ.წ.ა.წ.ა.წ.ა.* 'servant' of that person on whom the deceased was himself dependent and renders him the same services which lay as an obligation on this latter.

Furthermore, in the same document it is stated that 'a childless *ა.ნ.ჯ.ა.* ['peasant'] or *ა.ჯ.წ.ა.წ.ა.წ.ა.* has the right to adopt whomsoever he desires and to transfer to him all his inheritance'⁶.

A nobleman or prince with whom contractual kinship was established became the same *'ა.ჯ.წ.ა.წ.ა.წ.ა.* even though he was not in fact reared in the given kinship-group, whilst the woman with whose breast he brought his lips in contact was made his milk-mother, her husband the milk-father, their children his milk-brothers and sisters. As a result of such contractual kinship peasants hoped to obtain patronage. A contractual son, who enjoyed practically the same rights and obligations as those enjoyed by a real son [The text here has 'ward, foster-son' -- Translator], in some cases actually took care of his contractual parents, protected them and, in case of necessity, took upon himself a significant part of the expenses for their funeral, mourning and memorial. For his part too he acquired reliable persons whom custom obliged to carry out certain duties for him. For example, at festivals (Easter and Christmas) peasant families who had contracted kinship with him presented him with 'his portion' (*ჯ.ა.წ.ა.წ.ა.წ.ა.წ.ა.*) in the form of various products; they worked for him free of charge when he organised a collective weeding of the maize-fields (*ა.წ.ა.წ.ა.წ.ა.*); they helped him in other tasks too. There were few peasants who would not be obliged to contract such 'kinship'. Some of them even had three, four and even more such fostered *'ა.ჯ.წ.ა.წ.ა.წ.ა.* 'ward(s)'. Only exceptionally powerful representatives of influential peasant families who even tried to vie with some noblemen could consider all this to be non-essential for them. One such, so they say, was Hasan Dzhop'ua, a peasant from Ch'lou.

Sometimes whole communities entered by means of adoption into collective relations of patronage with this or that high-ranking individual, who was to some degree invested with power in society. Such a person the Abkhazians termed *ა.წ.ა.წ.ა.წ.ა.წ.ა.*, roughly 'village-elder, manager, overseer'. According to the description of A. P. Cherepov, 'Many communities, adopting and taking into wardship the children and relatives of their patron, not infrequently recognised the patronage of those *ა.წ.ა.წ.ა.წ.ა.წ.ა.* who enjoyed a high reputation. In such associations both sides gained their share of advantages: the *ა.წ.ა.წ.ა.წ.ა.წ.ა.* increased their influence on the affairs of the region in proportion to the number of the communities standing under their protection,

⁶Project for the land-development of the Sukhum Military District (put together by the Sukhum Commission on Class and Land), 25 February 1869, TsGIA of the Georgian SSR, fund 416.3 affair 1017, p. 34.

and who were ever ready to support the meaning of the bond by force of arms, whilst those dependent upon him (а.х.л.а.'рҕә) gained in moral influence and by the power which was at the disposal of the patron for the defence of the security of each bond⁷.

Having given in general outline a characterisation and description of the rite of adoption and contractual brotherhood, I shall adduce separate, empirical facts which belong to more recent times -- from the first half of the 19th until the start of the 20th century. It is essential to note that, although cases of contractual kinship have also been encountered in respect of women (e.g. Princess Ch. Achba was several times adopted as 'daughter' in the village of Otxara), nevertheless, as distinct from *atalychestvo*, 'adoption' and 'contractual brotherhood' affected *ex vi termini* primarily males, who played the major role in the socio-political life of the region. Princes and noblemen for their part rivalled one another in seeking to bring up or adopt someone from the members of the ruling house, having thereby the aim of guaranteeing for themselves the protection and support of Abkhazia's principal feudal lord. It may be supposed that the latter in the majority of cases also happily entered into this, for he could adroitly in his own interests take advantage of different patriarchal traditions, of which there was no shortage in his country.

Thus, we already know that the ruler Mikhail came to be the ward of Hadzhi Kerantux Berzek, head of the tribe of the Ubykhs. Amongst the people there is also a memory of Mikhail being adopted by the mountaineers of the Western Caucasus. Thus, in the words of the old man Myst. Ash^Wba, the ruler was adopted many times especially into the family of Adag^Wa, specifically into the house of Hadzhi Adag^Wa-Ipa the Great (there was, they say, also a Hadzhi Adag^Wa-Ipa the Lesser). According to other, parallel sources of information, one of the rulers of Abkhazia received an upbringing in the family of the Awublaa. Such a family certainly was to be found amongst the Ubykhs, which enjoyed great prestige among them. Thus, for example, the estates of the Ubykh nobleman by name Axmat' Awublaa 'extended between the mouths of the rivers Mitsa, Sochi and Psaxa, and consisted of 700 households'. It was so influential that other Ubykh noblemen (for example, those belonging to the family Berzek) promised to follow its example in expressing submission to the Russian government⁸.

Besides certain political gains for the ruler, who was constantly striving to create a positive combination of unions, the customs of *atalychestvo* and adoption brought him a very important material advantage, which cannot be underestimated. In one archive-document we read: 'In 1850 the wife of the ruler of Abkhazia was one of the guests

⁷I.G. Antelava, G.A. Dzidzaria, A.A. Olonetskij 'From the history of peasant-reform in Abkhazia', Historical Archive, book 5, 1950, p. 403.

⁸Central State Military-Historical Archive, fund VUA, act 6122, pp.1-5. Report of Gen Raevskij of 16 July 1810 (see the article of A. Fadeev 'Müridism as a tool of the aggressive politics of Turkey and England' -- Questions of History, 1951, No. 9).

invited to the home of Prince Tlaps Inal-Ipa in the settlement of Mazyx^{Wa}. The wife of Tlaps, according to the custom, adopted the ruler's wife, and for this occasion Prince Tlaps Inal-Ipa made a gift to the sovereign's wife of 3,000 roubles in cash, 12 horses and four peasant-households. On just such an occasion of adoption in 1862 Prince Titu Inal-Ipa made a gift to the son of the ruler, Prince Giorgi Shervashidze, of 16 horses, 3 silver saddles and four families of peasants in the settlement of K'aldax^{Wara}⁹. The residents of the village of Mark^W'yla (Ochamchira [wətʃəmtʃərə] Region) at the start of the 19th century gave to the ruler Safar-Bey (d. 1821) one goat per household 'as if by adoption', as is stated in the records of the Sukhum Commission on Class and Land¹⁰.

K^W'atsia Marshan, resident of the village of K^W'achara, was, according to his own account, invited as an object of adoption by the peasant K^J'ag^{Wa} Basaria (of the village K^W'yt'ol). He travelled there with several comrades. The head of the house in connection with this event prepared a large feast for the guests. Before sitting down at the table, they laid a cover in the courtyard of the house, set up a little chair, and sat there the wife of the household-head; she revealed her right breast, having placed over it a covering of fine silken material. As for K^W'atsia, he, in the presence of all those assembled there, knelt in front of her and in this position thrice performed the rite of 'biting the breast' of the lady, who thereby became his milk-mother. Then the meal was taken, proceeding solemnly. At the table he took his place of honour, and in front of him they set the above-mentioned, venerated portion of the creature slaughtered in his honour. Apart from this, on departure he received by way of gifts a horse and two bulls.

Princes and noblemen who were adopted aimed at abrogating to themselves false bequests sometimes even when their adoptive families plainly had heirs among their close relatives. Characteristic in this regard is a fact relating to the year 1863 as observed by the Sukhum Commission on Class and Land:

X^Wtyt Dzhadzhia was childless and, living near Dzhamlet Margania, invited the latter to his place and adopted him. When X^Wtyt died, his relatives carried off all the possessions and all the land of the deceased. Dzhamlet didn't say anything against this; but 10 years later, when Russian rule was established in Samurzaq'ano, Dzhamlet started to say that, when X^Wtyt adopted him, he laid down the condition according to which Dzhamlet was to inherit all of X^Wtyt's property. In truth, a certain document was apparently in Dzhamlet's possession, but the relatives of the deceased continue to this day to quarrel with him. When Dzhamlet began to demand X^Wtyt's inheritance, Shxanyq^W'a Dzhadzhia and the servant of the deceased, P(')ax^Wyl Ch'q'onía, went to Tsarcha to the Anchabadzes; from there Shxanyq^W'a went to the person who had fostered him in Gudava, where Shxanyq^W'a's children live even now, whilst P(')ax^Wyl Ch'q'onía still lives in Ts'archa. The land

⁹TsGIA of the Georgian SSR, fund 416.3 affair 1014, p. 42.

¹⁰TsGA [Central State Archive] of the Abkhazian ASSR, fund 56, act 5, p. 102.

of Shxanyq^Wa Dzhadzhia is now unoccupied, but his children, at the time of the grape-harvest, come to Gal and gather in the grapes from their father's orchard¹¹.

The significance of the custom of adoption and *atalychestvo* in the area was well understood by such a specialist of the life of the mountaineers as the secret agent of the Tsar's command, the educated 'Caucasian officer' Baron Tornau. With the aim of the speedy fulfilment of a dangerous mission from headquarters, he was himself obliged to take the step of being adopted in the year 1835 in the home of the Abkhazian nobleman Solomon Mkanba (in the village of Anx^Wa) by a resident of the mountain-community of Psh^Wy, the Abkhazian Bagry. The well-trained spy well appreciated that this Abkhazian, appointed to him as guide, once contracted to the obligation of being his *atalyk*, would remain trustworthy to the death and would never under any circumstance betray him. Here is how Tornau himself writes about this:

Among the Circassians (Cherkess) there is a long-standing custom not to bring up in their home children of high-ranking birth. Soon after birth, they hand over a boy for feeding and rearing to another family until he grows up and learns how to master weapons. Very often they choose for this an entirely different tribe. The person who takes in a child for rearing is known as the *atalyk* and acquires all the rights of blood-kinship with the family of his foster-child. This custom greatly facilitates the reconciliation and association of mountain-families and communities belonging to different tribes; as for the children, they learn to speak in foreign varieties of speech, which for them is entirely advantageous given the multilingualism existing in the Caucasus. The women take care of their foster-children with special tenderness, and the latter become more strongly attached to those who nourish them from outside, the less they know their own blood-mothers. The mountaineers are convinced that any harm done by the *atalyk* to his foster-child brings inevitable misfortune upon the family of the *atalyk*, which falls pre-eminently upon the nourisher. Apart from *atalychestvo* there exists yet another type of contractual kinship, the preservation of which is enjoined by custom just as piously as real *atalychestvo*. If two persons have agreed to form between each other a union for life and death, the wife or mother of one of them allows the friend of her husband or son to touch her breast three times with his lips, after which he is considered to be a relative of the family and enjoys the same sort of protection as belongs to a real foster-child. On such an occasion gifts are made to the *atalyk* and the nurse. The wife of Bagry, having come with her husband as guest to the patriarchal home, was present; and so, the matter faced no great obstacles. With the agreement of her husband, Hatx^Wa made me her relative in the described manner; on this occasion our union was sealed by some pieces of paper, linen, scissors and needles, which are deemed in Psh^Wy to be priceless rarities, as well as a kinjal [Caucasian dagger] with golden inlay. Bagry, having undertaken the obligation of *atalyk*, belonged to me entirely. Thanks to his superstition and the attachment he showed towards his wife, I could rely on him as on my very self¹².

¹¹TsGA of the Abkhazian ASSR, fund 57, act 5, p. 140.

¹²F.F. Tornau 'Notes of a Caucasian Officer', Moscow 1864, p. 82.

We already know that in certain cases the adopter or adoptive father of an important person became rich himself and acquired great weight in the community. Thus, the famous Abzhywa prince Xabyg^W Achba was raised by the father of Dzhyr Ax^Wba (village of Ch'lou). The father of the prince died early, and his mother remarried, and so Xabyg^W remained with his foster-father till his coming of age. In the course of time he acquired great influence, and very many sought his protection and assistance. In order to gain for themselves success in this regard, several people sought to enlist the preliminary protection of his milk-brother, Dzhyr, who in connection with this received throughout his life in different localities 101 honorary invitations aimed at adopting him or making him a member of the relevant family. At one place three brothers (Hashym, Suleiman and Luman Tarba from Bzyp Abkhazia) all at once 'introduced him to their home', having allowed him to touch the breasts of their wives. Several took advantage of the opportunity when Dzhyr Ax^Wba just happened to visit them as guest to offer him honorary kinship, as, for instance, took place in the family of the peasant Wyrys-Ipa in the village of Dal. Another example: the daughter of the prince Gr. Chachba, who at the time was living in the village of Atara, was given out for rearing to an Ataran peasant Xak^W'yts^W Kvitsinia (K^W'ts'nia). She resided with him till the age of marriage, and so not only Xak^W'yts^W but all of his large family were considered to be her *atalyks*. But only one of his sons, Hazarat K^W'ts'nia, gained from this. Seeing the prince's protection over the *atalyk* of his daughter, animal-thieves did not dare to annoy Hazarat. Apart from this, he was able to pasture his herd on the broad princely estates and as a result built up not a small fortune -- hundreds of head of narrow-hooved animals, tens of cows, a herd of horses, and at one time, so they say, he possessed a further 12 milking buffalo.

In connection with the custom of adoption a story or legend was recorded by me from the words of the old man Tamshyg^W Dzhap'ua (village of Ch'lou) under the title 'Father and Son from the same Womb', which, as he affirmed, was based on real facts:

Eshsow [jəʂsəw] Daryq^W-Ipa Marshan (who lived in the first half of the 19th century in the village of Dal) was one day visited by guests, the rearers of his son, from Kabarda. On departure they issued an invitation to Eshsow and informed him that they would give him the chance to raid seven farms. The rapacious Eshsow, unable to contain himself for long, turned up there at the head of a brigade of 300 men. But at this moment some other person managed to attack first the folk who had been earmarked for the Dal prince, plundered them and carried them off as prisoners. Eshsow with his brigade gave chase to the raiders, who had got in before them; he overtook them and secured the return of everything, both people and animals. The son of Eshsow, the ward of the Kabardians, also took part in this exploit; he, as custom dictated, had not yet shown himself to his father (ja.b ja.q'nə də'tə^Wə.rəm.ts'ə.z.t', i.e. 'he had not yet made an appearance before his father'). On returning from the adventure news reached Eshsow of the death of his son. This so upset him that he became thoroughly morose and gave up speaking -- for according to the conditions of the

custom, he was not supposed to lament or in any other way express out loud his grief over the loss of his son. Eshsow even abstained from eating. Seeing this, those around him also could not eat and would throw all the meat to the dogs. On the fourth day some woman in deep mourning, with a child in her arms, came before Eshsow (who just sat all the time, not lifting his head), and she asked:

'Is that you, Eshsow, son of Daryq^w'a?'

'Yes,' he replied with difficulty, sorrowfully raising his head.

'How could it be that you've never heard of anything worse than what you have suffered?! What does it all mean, this giving up of eating? You should eat with relish!' was the opinion she voiced. This woman had a perplexing effect on Eshsow. He interrupted her and asked what her words meant. And she narrated the following tale:

'I was the wife of a stout-hearted fellow. A prince lived close by us. He and my husband were rivals; in nothing would one of them give way to the other. One day my husband said to me: "I fear that at some time or other the prince and I shall come to blows. In order to forestall this I'd like to form a adoptive kinship with him."

"Fine," I answered him. "How can I speak against your desire, much less refuse my breast to the man you wish to make your brother?!"

'And so, we issued an invitation to the prince. From dawn preparations for the banquet were in progress. At that time I had three children, the oldest approaching 13. Suddenly we were unexpectedly attacked (it would seem at the instigation of the prince); my husband was killed on the spot and the oldest son carried off. I ran to the yard, and at the door at this moment the middle boy, playing with a knife, slashed the youngest one in the cradle. He himself, recoiling in horror, fell into a pot of boiling milk over the fire and was burned. I buried my husband and children; the neighbours dispersed. That very night another attack! I was carried off with all my possessions. For many years I wandered from place to place. I suffered not a few torments before finding my present master. For a year and a half I have served him, not sparing myself, as best I could. He took pity on me and married me off to one of his best servants (s.t.'tə.r.pə.r). From him I had a son. One day while rocking the babe to sleep in the cradle, I unwittingly let out a deep sigh -- till that moment I had uttered not one sound about my despair. "What's the matter with you?" enquired my husband. Despite all my disavowals, he forced me to relate the whole of my past.

"My God, I am the son of yours that was carried off! Can it really be that the one to whom I'm married is my mother?!" he shrieked, and there on the spot he shot himself. I buried him too. This infant -- the woman pointed to the little one -- is the son of my son; and he as well as his father issued from the same womb, my own! That is what happened to me! As for you, Eshsow, aren't you ashamed to lament like that the loss of your son and to torment everyone else!" said she, finishing her sad story.

According to another legend, there once lived in Ts'ebelda [Ts'abal] a hero Mancha: One day, returning from distant places, Mancha came upon 100 armed horsemen with Selim, son of Hatx^w, at their head. 'Good day!', was the greeting offered by Mancha, but they did not respond

to him. Offended by this, he blocked their path and in the ensuing crossfire did away with them all, barring one. Mancha wished to grant him the gift of life, as the one to carry the bad news back home, but he had no wish for this. A duel took place, in which the last representative of Selim's special band of warriors was also slain. Mancha set off with a wound in the leg. Night caught him on the road, and he went to spend the night with a shepherd at his station. Mancha didn't give his name and also concealed his wound. In the morning he intended to leave quietly the welcoming hut, without waking the shepherd, but the latter woke up and said: 'What's with you, Mancha, leaving without so much as a by your leave?' Cut to the quick, the hero turned back, sat down and confessed that a wound was troubling him. The shepherd instantly took the wounded man to his mother, famed for her great knowledge of medicine. The shepherd's skilful mother cured Mancha within a month, went so far as to adopt him even, and sent him on his way with great gifts and honours¹³.

One more legend:

Once upon a time Abkhazia was laid waste as a result of the rivalry between the ruler and Prince Marshan. Only two families were left -- Dzhap'ua, which family lived in the 'forest of the giants' somewhere in the region of today's Sochi, whilst the other family was Anua, somehow confined amongst the thick undergrowth in the neighbourhood of Satamasho (on the seashore in the village of Kindghi [K'yndygh] in the Ochamchira District). From the mountains came representatives of three families: Achba, Adleiba and Inapshba. The first encountered the Dzhap'uas, and from there they all together went to the Anuas in Satamasho. The Dzhap'uas and Anuas formed kinship by means of the rite of adoptive brotherhood. As a consequence, these families to this day are considered to be bound by fraternal ties, and it is therefore not even permitted, in accordance with the legend, for marriage-ties to be contracted between their representatives¹⁴.

¹³ Bagrat V. Shinkuba [Shynk^w'ba] *Abkhazian Folk-Poetry*. Sukhum. 1959. pp. 13-4.

¹⁴ Recorded from the words of the old man X. Dzhonua in 1947 in the village of Otap [Watap] in the Ochamchira District.

CHAPTER II

ATALYK FOSTERAGE AND FEUD

Atalychestvo and adoption were recognised amongst the people as a means of achieving reconciliation for relations of enmity between individuals and family-groups, and sometimes even between whole communities. It is true that among the Abkhazians one of the strongest methods of ending blood-enmity was also a cleansing oath and the swearing of allegiance, which were held in 'sacred' spots or before the deity of the blacksmith's forge (ა.'ქ'ჴა). But in this regard *atalychestvo* was an even more important, more widespread and effective method of calming down the social masses.

Here one is speaking not of true class-antagonism, from which there usually develops a constant and irreconcilable class-consciousness, but mainly of individual, episodic hostile clashes of persons from much the same class-status and of the folk-methods for halting blood-retribution in accordance with surviving customary law. When, then, a blood-feud did develop between representatives of different classes, i.e. between feudal lords and the peasants, greater misfortune did, of course, fall upon the fate of the peasants in both moral, physical and especially material respects. Suffice it to say that the blood of peasants foamed far more than that of princes, who rarely suffered punishment for the killing of a peasant, although they did not always succeed in avoiding certain formalities according to custom. But for the killing, albeit accidental, of a prince innumerable woes befell peasants. Even if agreement was successfully achieved on a reconciliation by means of fostering or the like, the peasant and his family were nevertheless obliged for the rest of their lives to carry heavy additional burdens, linked to the institution of *atalychestvo*, which was almost completely feudalised by the 19th century. The materials adduced here well illustrate the feudal essence of *atalychestvo* in Abkhazia in the 19th century.

One who was adopted or fostered by way of reconciliation was designated by a special term which can roughly be translated as 'ward for the price of blood' [or 'blood-ward'] (ა.ჯა.'ჴსა.ქ'ჴა.ქ'ჴა)¹⁵.

Deeds of blood-enmity relating to something especially serious and dangerous demanded particular attention on the part of the entire community. For this reason they were usually discussed and decided at general folk-assemblies with the obligatory participation of both the representatives of the interested parties and the most authoritative and knowledgeable persons of good will from not only that settlement but also from other communities. Such assemblies saw it as their goal to 'extinguish' the enmity. And to achieve this goal there was no better or more reliable means -- easy in availability and also honourable -- than for both parties to invoke for help this ancient custom, and thus simply to link the foes by the ties of milk-kinship. And in this way the

¹⁵In parallel amongst the Circassians an adopted person is known as ღ'ა.ღ'ა.ჯ.ღ'ა.ღ (i.e. 'one fostered for blood').

people in their gatherings in every possible way tried to secure the agreement of the injured party to being reconciled by means of *atalychestvo* or adoption. Not eager to go against the will of the people, the injured party usually gave assent to the reconciliation and gave out his son, daughter, brother, sister or some other close relative for fostering or adoption to the party of the killer, by which means the enmity was brought to an end forever.

Desirous of reconciling blood-enemies, people's judges, administering justice according to the traditional canon of customary law, would appeal to both parties to the enmity, above all to the injured side, with roughly the following words: 'We sentence you in exactly the same way as we would sentence ourselves, had we been in your position! Hark unto the voice of folk-wisdom -- the word of the people is just; it heals any wound! There is no power stronger than a mother's milk: a bullet cannot pierce a single drop of it! Accept fosterage and be reconciled! And we, the whole people, shall be pleased. May the enmity between you be henceforth extinguished!' Rarely, it is true, but it did sometimes happen that a killer from even the upper class was obliged to agree to the adoption or fosterage of a peasant son or daughter from the injured side with the aim of putting a stop to a blood-feud.

With this goal of reconciliation, the side of the killer was occasionally obliged even to abduct a child belonging to the injured party. From the moment that this child tasted milk from the breast of the mother of the guilty person, or of some other woman belonging to his family, the blood-feud came to an end. A killer, striving to avoid a feud, might break into the home of the victim or with his companions keep watch for the necessary woman from the injured family and forcefully touch her bosom with his lips. A feud also came to an end in cases where the mother, sister or wife of the killer stole into the house of the victim, grabbed hold of the first child from this family she came across, and made a pretence of feeding him with the breast. Another time, as attested also in folklore, eager at all costs to succeed in establishing milk-kinship with the aim of bringing an enmity to an end, one would steal in on a woman and touch her breasts while she was asleep in order thereby to present the opponents with the *fait accompli* of milk-kinship already contracted.

Given acute relations between blood-feuders, when the party bearing the grudge refused to make a move towards reconciliation, it would happen that one of the women of the killer's family, dressed in men's clothes so as not to be recognised, would visit as a guest the house of the opponent and, seizing the moment, would unexpectedly fall upon the cradle and present her nourishing breast to the householder's child. Just one such bringing of the child's mouth into contact with the breast of the woman from the enemy's family was enough to establish peace between irreconcilable blood-feuders. P'et're Ch'araia writes in his above-mentioned work: 'It often happened that a blood-enemy absolutely refused to make a move to peace. Then secretly they took his child or

the child of his close relative and brought him up. All this, voluntarily or involuntarily, led to peace between the blood-enemies; for killing was deemed an affront "to the breast" of the rearer, a profanation of the "breast", and this does not befit valour¹⁶.

In the middle of the 19th century the Marshan princes from Gup [G^Wyp] carried out attacks on the village of Ch'lou. The prince of Ch'lou, Bat'a Achba, with his own men pursued the pillagers and caught up with them on the banks of the River Mokva [Myk^W] in the village of Txina. An exchange of fire ensued, and *inter alios* both leaders were killed. The mother of Bat'a Achba, who was from the very same family as the Marshans from G^Wyp, said that her brother perished on one side and her son on the other -- and that, although they were different by lineal origin, the son was the more important. Consequently, the princes of Ch'lou considered themselves to be the offended parties, insofar as they had suffered the assault and lost the more eminent person, all of which threatened new bloody clashes. So as not to permit this, the G^Wyp princes managed to persuade their opponents to accept reconciliation through fosterage. But in order that no-one could say that the Ch'lou princes had agreed to an unworthy reconciliation, the G^Wypians abducted the three year-old son of the slain Bat'a Achba, fostered him for 3 years and then brought him back with many gifts and honours. Thus did their reconciliation come about, and thereafter the respective families were deemed to be mutually related from generation to generation. One woman from the family of the Marshans of G^Wyp almost to our own day thus referred to the grandson of Bat'a Achba by the term, respected according to custom, 'my 'ax^Wap^ha'.

In 1915, in the village of K^W'yt'ol, the following happened. The peasant K^W'ana Q'olbaia had a splendid horse. One day the princes Dzapsh-Ipa and Marshan came to his place, trapped the horse and wanted to carry it off from its owner by force. A noise was heard, and a neighbouring peasant, Narik Lasuria [Narik' Lash^Wria] came running. He shot and killed Prince Dzapsh-Ipa, whilst the other prince succeeded in escaping, leaving the horse behind. The princes demanded ten peasant-lives for the murdered prince. A dreadful threat hung over the village, and it was essential to achieve the reconciliation of the parties at any cost. That is why the local peasant K^W'ana Ch'k'adua, who was reputed to be a daring opponent of the princes, took with him one warrior companion and went with him to the village of Txina. Entering the yard of Prince Dzapsh-Ipa, they went up to the house, climbed through a window slightly ajar, and entered into the room where the brother of the victim was sleeping with his wife and child. Without being noticed, they took away the cradle with the babe, placed it on a horse and made off hurriedly with their precious load, which was necessary to preserve the lives of many persons. The prince of Txina galloped after them in order to take back the child, but he was already unable to do this because it conflicted with the

¹⁶P'et're Ch'araia *loc. cit.* 'Iveria' 1888, No. 173.

wishes of the whole people who had gathered together. Narik' Lash^Wria himself fostered the child with special diligence. Having completed the fostering, he took the child back to its father with great gifts and honours appropriate to a fostering by rite of blood-price; the giving of presents was even extended later to all persons participating in the celebrations.

In this way the homicide related here took place against a background of class-antagonism. And, although the act of fostering consequent upon it saved the peasants from a direct blood-feud, it nevertheless demanded of them endless material expenses in favour of the prince. In a word, the peasants paid a huge price for such 'reconciliation'.

Here is what N. Koljubakin relates about how Prince D_ conveyed to the Russian authorities in the autumn of 1840 the insolent Abkhazian prince Halyl-bey Marshan:

The Abkhazian prince Tago Zapshipa [= Tag^Wa Dzapsh-Ipa] entered into dealings with Halyl-bey and convinced him that through the patronage and official appeal of some important personage -- such as, for example, Prince D_ -- he would be pardoned and even enjoy the mercy of the authorities. For the supreme security of Halyl-bey, Prince D_ agreed to adopt him. They appointed the day and place for the ceremony of adoption. Present were Halyl-bey and with him Tago, unarmed, and then Prince D_ also, with twenty horsemen. It would have been an easy matter then and there, without more ado, to seize Halyl-bey openly; but he was bold, adroit, powerful, well-armed and, in defence of his life and freedom, might well kill someone... Better surely to achieve one's goal by a redoubling of guile! The bourka-cloak was laid out; on it, kneeling, is Halyl-bey; behind him Prince D_. Tago, with a thick knobkerry in his hands, and seated in front of him Prince D_, unfastens the *arxaluk* [Georgian *არხალუკი* 'Caucasian silk-shirt for men'] in order to uncover the breast, which the adoptee must touch with the lips. This is the fixed moment: Tago strikes Halyl with the full force of the knobkerry on the head, and, before he could regain his senses, they tie him up and hoist him onto a horse. Halyl-bey was delivered to Sukhum and shot there¹⁷.

We may adduce further examples. I refer firstly to a document found in the archival deeds of the Sukhum Commission on Class and Land. In it is stated:

Two of the *shinagma* [Georgian *შინაგმა* 'domestic serf'] of the Shervashidzes of Bedia, Mahmud Tsisbaia and Eslam Bagatelia, provided testimony in passing: Maxmud Tsisbaia to the effect that his grandfather had appointed land consisting of 5 households of Bua to guests [*ბუა*] who had come from the village of Kopyta. They paid their dues to Maxmud's grandfather and father, but lately they had abandoned paying dues to Maxmud. Maxmud wanted to punish them for this, but they declared to him that they had been living on their own plots for three generations and that they had received their plots by right of inheritance from their grandfathers and fathers, so that the land belonged to them and he could not remove it from them. They went to court. Bat'a and Gyd Shervashidze decided their case: Maxmud wanted to take an oath that the land belonged to him, but

¹⁷N. Koljubakin 'Records on Ts'ebelda'. TsGIA of the Georgian SSR, fund 416.4, affair 12, pp. 9-10.

Bat'a and Gyd did not allow him to do this and decided the matter in such a way that the Buas were obliged to take into fosterage the daughter of Maxmud and to continue living as previously in their places¹⁸.

In the words of an old man (A. Bzhanian), the last ruler of Abkhazia and one of his namesakes from the Abzhywa region [central Abkhazia] were involved in an endless civil quarrel. The ruler would mount frequent raids and ravage the villages that were subject to his opponent. In order to avoid this, twelve of the best women of the village of Kindghi [K'yndygh] adopted him by means of the regular lip-touching on the breasts of these women. Apart from this, the peasants of this settlement showered gifts -- 60 head of cattle and three choice oxen -- on their adoptee, who henceforth became their protector.

Communities and principalities dotted along the coast frequently became foes of one another, who attacked and ravaged each other. The Sadz (Dzhikets) [a northern Abkhazian tribe living until 1864 around today's border between Abkhazia and Russia] were especially ferocious. It is said that once the Bzyp [now the most northerly Abkhazians] gathered together with them with the aim of conducting negotiations on the conditions for a reconciliation with modern-day Veselovka. It was decided to bring there from both parties 500 women with suckling infants, and to make an exchange of the babes, hence establishing a huge mutual fostering to strengthen the fraternity that had been shaken. This is what was actually done.

At a wedding-feast in the village of K^W'yt'ol the peasant K^W'ast'a K'oghonia accidentally killed Tengiz Marshan, brother of the important Abzhywan feudal lord, Prince Dmitri Marshan (village of G^Wyp), with a shot from his pistol. Regardless of the patently accidental nature of what had occurred, in order to avert the inevitable, severe vendetta, K^W'ast'a K'oghonia decided to take into fosterage someone from the family of the victim. At this time little Ardawan, a relative of the dead man, was being reared by one of the peasants in the village of Txina. K'oghonia succeeded in kidnapping the child from the home of his *atalyk*: the fact of the kidnapping -- evidently not without the tacit approval of a Txina resident -- only became known to the parents of the child one year later. By this he guaranteed himself against any enmity on the part of Prince Marshan.

The brother of Shuli Lak'eba (in the 1920s) was killed by bearers of the surname Tarkj'yl (village of Duripsh). With the aim of achieving a reconciliation, the Tarkj'yls invited Shuli Lak'eba and organised a reception of honour, allowing him to touch with his lips the breast of the wife of the killer (for he had no mother), and placed before him on the table the shoulder-blade of the slaughtered animal. In a word, they showered him with the sort of honours that it was incumbent on them to show in establishing a

¹⁸TsGA of the Abkhazian ASSR, fund 57, archive 5, pp. 174-5.

adoptive kinship. But were the blame to lie with the side of the one who had been killed, then it could happen also that they would give the killer the opportunity of being adopted by the family of the dead person according to the self-same rite.

In 1921 one of the bearers of the surname Avidzba killed Isu Gobechia (village of Lyxny). The people assembled. Having determined 'to extinguish the enmity', they sentenced the Avidzbas to foster the son of Isu. Both parties agreed to this, and so the enmity ended. A parallel incident took place also in the village of G^Wyp at the close of the 19th century. The peasant T'ag^Wa Harazia, having fallen out with the nobleman Almasxan Atumaa, publicly inflicted on the latter a wound on the face with a knife. Fearing the inevitable feud on the part of the nobleman, T'ag^Wa Harazia was obliged to kidnap the son of his dangerous enemy who happened to be in fosterage with the Tania family (village of Pak^Wash), bringing him up, fostering him and then conducting him to his parents with honour and great gifts. Following such milk-kinship former blood-enemies even became great mutual friends.

A great deal was forgiven to contractual milk-relatives, who had become such by way of lifting blood-retribution. 'You take a good many liberties, as though you'd been brought here in the guise of an a.fə.'psəx^Wəpħə [blood-ward]!', is what people say of a person who behaves too freely in a given social circle. 'Blood is washed away by a mother's milk, but under no circumstances has blood mixed with milk', the old man K^Wyta Zantaria used to say, having in view the custom of forbidding enmities after the establishment of milk-kinship. He related the following:

Between Bazala and KJamach Zantaria (village of T'amsh) there developed a quarrel over some land, whereupon the latter with his brother Ch'yinch'a gave Bazala a sound beating. In answer, the son of Bazala, Maga, wounded both the attackers. With the aim of reconciliation, Bazala took the suckling child of KJamach as an a.fə.'psəx^Wəpħə [blood-ward]. One day the brothers KJamach and Ch'yinch'a also fell to squabbling: 'You call yourself a man when you were unable to get vengeance?' was how KJamach upbraided his brother. 'Well, didn't they do us the honour of taking an a.fə.'psəx^Wəpħə [blood-ward] from us?' was Ch'yinch'a's response. 'They took my son -- so much for your contribution there!' said KJamach. Cut to the quick by this, Ch'yinch'a, without giving the matter much forethought, killed Bazala. They gathered the people together. Ch'yinch'a sat himself down at home, playing on the a.pə'ə.r'tsə [a two-stringed, viol-like folk-instrument]. His parents signed a statement to the effect that they had no wish to set eyes on the son who had mixed milk with blood and exiled the killer to a place where he died. As for the child, the a.fə.'psəx^Wəpħə [blood-ward], they allowed no-one to lay a finger on him and reared him to the full.

K'yg^W Ak^Wysba (village of Atara), according to his very own words, had such an experience as this. His brother was accidentally killed in a quarrel by Denuar K^W'ts'nia. A year passed, and K'yg^W Ak^Wysba laid on the 12-month memorial repast. On this day Denuar K^W'ts'nia along with his father, mother, sisters, relatives and accompanied by other honourable persons came to the grave of the murdered man with

a bull in mourning garb and with candles on its horns. All the K^W'ts'nia^s there present, also in mourning clothes, knelt around the fence of the grave. The killer and his mother crossed over the fence of the grave, and then, embracing the grave, he lay down with his face towards its head. As he remained in such a posture, they despatched a deputation to the brother of the deceased. The deputation informed K'yg^W Ak^Wysba that the K^W'ts'nia^s were kneeling around the grave -- this was tantamount to a.f.a.'psa.x^Wa.pfia [blood-wardship] -- and for their part requested he be granted pardon, that there should be reconciliation between them, and that they invite them in to the memorial feast, where they would enter bringing the best sacrificial bull. K'yg^W Ak^Wysba assented, went to the grave, pardoned the unwitting enemy, and invited them to his home to participate in the memorial feast.

According to the narrative of T. K^W'ts'nia, there lived in Abkhazia in the 19th century a manly woman by the name of Shamsia Baalow-pha. They insist that she often took part in distant and dangerous raids at the head of her own gang and that on her account not a few killings occurred. She, therefore, had more than one blood-enemy. One day, desirous of being reconciled with the Marshan princes of Dal, Shamsia abducted one of their children and brought him as an a.f.a.'psa.x^Wa.pfia [blood-ward] to her relatives, the Marshan princes of Ts'ebelda [Ts'abal].

In this way we see that -- given the powerful development of the harsh law of the blood-feud, such as was observed still in the Abkhazia of not too long ago -- the custom of milk-kinship had great significance as the most radical means in the conditions of those days for bringing to an end any relations of enmity.

CHAPTER III

DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF *ATALYK* FOSTERAGE

Mutual kinship-relations on the basis of *atalychestvo* did not end with the cessation of fostering in the strict sense of the word. On the contrary, there were attempts not only to support but also to develop and strengthen these relationships. As folk say, 'Kinship is also subject to ageing'. And for this reason from time to time, relations of kinship by *atalychestvo* were sometimes renewed. Kinship-ties renewed by virtue of 'ageing', i.e. by virtue of the weakening of the relevant links and of the recollection of them in memories, [and] relations between ward and the *atalyk's* group were more widespread than such as might develop from the fact of fostering in itself. Relations did not end along with the act of fostering but were preserved and manifested themselves in different forms, being handed on by inheritance. These relations were considered to be not inferior but rather, one might say, even superior to actual blood-relations. All members of the *atalyk's* group together with him considered themselves to be the fosterer of the given individual. The ward, for his part, was obliged to do everything he could to defend their interests (and while the ward was still under-age, these duties were undertaken by his parents and brothers). Both sides stood together through all the difficult and solemn occasions of their lives.

From milk-kinship there ensued definite (consolidated by custom), onerous duties and obligations on the part of the peasants in relation to their wards, princes and nobles. This was actually noted even by the authors of the 'Short Record on Class and Land Relations in Abkhazia and Samurzaq'ano [today's Gal District]' (1868): 'The duties of this class (ა.ნ.ა. 'ყა -- the highest category of peasant -- Sh. I.) have taken the form of voluntary offerings, repeated over the course of an extended number of years, or indeed they take as a start different types of good turns and allowances, rendered to persons of this class by the protectors of their communities, and in this way close relations begin with the latter through fostering and adoption'. In the same document 'the payment of *ა.ყ.ბარ* in his (the ruler's -- Sh. I.) favour' is mentioned as one of the duties of the peasants -- *ა.ყ.ბარ* 'payment for milk' from *ა.ყ.* 'milk' -- i.e. payment for the marriage of a girl of this class (usually a cow or 10 roubles). At the same time the fiancé, after bringing home the bride, or before this, was obliged to pay a set price for the rearing of his bride -- a horse, cow, buffalo -- to the person to whom his wife belonged as milk-sister. This price too was called *ა.ყ.ბარ* [?'milk-wealth].

ა.ყ.ბარ is characterised as the necessary price paid by the fiancé in favour of the '*ა.ყ.ა.ჴა* 'ward' for marriage to the milk-sister of the latter. 'This is what we have heard from our fathers; it had already ceased to exist by our own time,' is what old folk say. The size of this offering was not strictly defined. As many people assert, the quantity of it was limited by the possibilities and conscience of the fiancé, and often it was the equivalent of a cow or its price. The correctness of this assertion is supported,

The material relations of the *atalyk* with his ward were expressed further in the form of regular substantial offerings on the part of the peasants, i.e. in the delivery by members of the kin-group of the *atalyk*, especially on set days of the year, of different 'ward-portions' ('a.x^wə.p^hə jə.'x^wə) to him at home. If the peasants failed to fulfil their obligations to deliver regularly 'by custom' to their 'a.x^wə.p^hə this or that range of offerings, then in this way they incurred the displeasure of their 'protector', which was fraught with dangerous consequences for them. The Monday after Easter was well-known by the special designation a.tsəp.'x^wə [whilst -x^wə means 'portion', the meaning of the preceding morpheme is unclear -- Translator]. This day the peasants, primarily from the number of fosterers, dedicated to their 'a.x^wə.p^hə, noblemen and princes; they would visit the 'lordly estates' (a.f.t.'nə) with congratulations and, of course, offerings -- they would deliver sheep, goats, geese, chickens, wine and other products of the best quality. The old lady Chyk^w' Ax^wba related that on this day all Ax^wbas with their families would make their way to the a.f.t.'nə of Prince Xabyg^wAchba (village of Ch'lou) and took to their master 'his portion', i.e. sheep, goats, Easter-eggs, different sweet-meats, capons, and so on. In just such a manner would come not only all the Ax^wbas, his fosterers, but many others too. People streamed non-stop, bringing gifts, and in one day the huge courtyard of the prince filled up with animals. In the village of Dzhgarda not only the direct fosterers but also other peasants bearing the surname Ash^wba were obliged by custom to visit Prince T'at'ash Marshan with offerings for the festivities, especially for Easter. Incidentally, they would gather at a certain place (in front of today's village-soviet building) and from there proceed to their 'a.x^wə.p^hə together. Gifts were offered to him also by many bearers of the surname Amch'ba, 'paying a home-visit' to his daughter, by bearers of the surname Sharmat and others.

The law of hospitality, which had [and has -- Translator], as is well-known, powerful force among the population of Abkhazia, was applied to members of the kin-group of the ward in the widest measure. The ward or other members of his family would often arrive at the *atalyk*'s with an entire retinue in train and remain lodging with him for 24 hours, if not longer, with the result that the host had to marshal all his powers in order that his reception of his guests be the most fulsome, his care for them the most diligent (suffice it to say that his daughters, according to custom, were obliged to wash the feet for the guests), and the entertainment with wine and fresh meat the most plentiful. In the words of one informant, whenever the mother of the ward, for instance, came to the home of the *atalyk*, he was obliged everyday to kill her a capon or sheep or to place before her on the table the honorary portion of meat, the shoulder-blade, of the horned animal slaughtered in her honour. Otherwise, she could insult him with the words: 'Wretch, it would seem that his knife has already been blunted!'²¹

²¹ Thus would they speak of a person not sufficiently hospitable.

It is essential to point also to the personal attachment between ward and the kin-group of his *atalyk*. Not only the immediate fosterers but not infrequently also the whole of their kin treated the ward as the most beloved entity and as one belonging to the actual family. The 'а.х.у.а.р.к.а was for them a holy individual. The fosterers chose for him in childhood a beautiful name. Seleznev already, quoting Interiano, an author of the 16th century, remarks: 'An outsider gives a name to the newborn, thereby substituting a godfather's name [he being the cross-father -- Sh. I.]²². By this name the members of the *atalyk*'s family would swear as by something holy, and not infrequently all of his relatives too. This was for them the strongest, unbreakable oath. For example, one could often hear sayings of the kind: 'If Tamshyg^W (the *atalyk*) said: "May Msowyst (the ward) not die!", then he won't drink even water'. The common form of the oath in respect to a foster-daughter was: 'May Ch'yich' not die!' (tʃ'ətʃ' dəm.'sə.jt'), as 'Ch'yich'' was a widespread affectionate nickname for an 'а.х.у.а.р.к.а of female gender. In general, though, all 'а.х.у.а.р.к.а were known lovingly and exaltedly by the name 'а.у.а.р.к.а, employed in the sense 'precious', 'most dear' [see p.50 below].

Members of the *atalyk*'s group and wards would often visit one another. When visiting the group of the *atalyk*, foster-children did not forget any of them and tried to call on each of them and to enquire after each. With such goals in mind, as it is told, the daughter of the ruler Mikhail once summoned all the G^Wymbas (village of Lykhny), the foster-parents of her father, and she herself paid a visit to several of them. The arrival of the 'а.х.у.а.р.к.а was a joyful occasion for the group of the *atalyk*. On departure, the milk-brothers would mount their horses and escort him a long way, from community to community.

Here is what the eye-witness, Tornau, writes on this matter in the 1830s:

In the evening Tembulat arrived, having extricated himself from the initial salutations of the people of Ahch'ypsy, who had escorted him in a crowd through the entire settlement. Their joy at seeing Karamurzin²³ was explained by the habit according to which among the mountaineers the inhabitants of the whole settlement, community and even country regard themselves as the *atalyks* of a child bearing a famous surname who has been fostered amongst them. In this fashion the Medovejans²⁴ called themselves the *atalyks* of Karamurzin, and all the Aba(d)zekhs [the most numerous Circassian tribe then living in the Caucasus] the *atalyks* of the Chemgui [or Temirgoi -- another Circassian tribe, today the most numerous one remaining in Adygheia] ruler Dzhembulat Ajtek.

²²M. Seleznev *loc. cit.*, p. 228.

²³According to Tornau, the Karamurzins, living more than 70 versts from Prochnyj Okop, 'belonged to the number of the wealthiest and most renowned Nogai princes' ('Notes of a Caucasian Officer', part II, p. 10); they 'counted their pedigree from the grandson of Chingis-Khan' (p. 12).

²⁴In the community of the Medovejans, made up of the Abkhazian settlements of Ahch'ypsy, Ajbga (on the R. Psou) and Chyzhg^Wyp (on the R. Chyzhypsy) the leading family was that of Prince Marshan. It is characteristic that the Kabardians term all Abkhazians in general 'Medovejans'.

On the dangerous journey across the mountains to the sea in the capacity of the main guide of the Tsarist scout Tornau, who had an important secret mission from the Russian army command in the Caucasus, Tembulat Karamurzin was escorted by the Medovejan Prince Sefer-bey from the Marshan family, who, as his milk-brother was thus his most trustworthy individual²⁵.

The influence of the *atalyk* on his ward was significant even after the latter's return home. Thus, in the words of Bishop Gavril, at the time of his baptism the son of Chrygba (village of Jashtx^Wa), the 12-13 year-old lad became obstinate and refused to stay in his room, and says the bishop:

The father threw himself on the boy in a rage and was prepared to apply his rights as a father to him, but I restrained him and ordered him to leave the child alone and not to compel him by force into being baptised. Investigating what sort of reasons might have caused such opposition to his father's wishes on the part of the lad, I discovered that he had lived the whole time with a fosterer and had only just become acquainted with his father; he was thus initially inclined not to assent to being baptised because the fosterers were Muslims...²⁶.

A foster-child, on the occasion of his being orphaned, found full care with his *atalyk* to his coming of age, his acquiring a family and separate homestead, for the *atalyk* helped him with all this in addition. In the archival deeds of the Sukhum Commission on Class and Land is to be found 'The petition of Xalil Ag^Wyshba, resident of the village of Shlara in the Pitsunda Region', in which it is stated:

My father, who lived in Adler, came to the settlement of Barmysh, where he married the daughter of the $\text{a.}\text{m.}\text{a.}\text{'t.}\text{a.}\text{K}^{\text{W}}\text{'adzhi P'abba}$. Having lived with her for a year or two, he went to live with her in Adler but left me with my foster-father. Sadly for me, while my parents were crossing from the settlement of Barmysh to Gagra, my father and mother drowned. In this way I was left, while still a child, without any protector, and the only one involved in my upbringing was K^Watash Lejba, resident of the settlement of Mg^Wydzyrx^Wa, in whose foster-care I found myself²⁷.

According to stories, the K'aldax^Waran Prince Sowlah^W the Younger was taken in his youth as an exile to Turkey. Prior to this he lived with his foster-parents, the Mg^Wydzyrx^Wan (Antsx^Wypian) peasants Zhiba. The fosterers, their milk-brothers, sisters and wet-nurse, went to Turkey to find and bring back their 'a.x^Wa.p^Wh.a from a foreign country overseas. Setting off for there, they took along the cartridges from his cherkesska-tunic that were in their safe-keeping. 'Show him this, then he'll realise that his foster-parents have arrived', they said upon reaching the place and sent him his cartridges. Sowlah^W returned with them to his homeland. Here they were the ones who helped him rebuild a homestead on the land of his forefathers, for the wet-nurse and

²⁵F. Tornau *op. cit.* part II, p.39.

²⁶Gavril, Bishop of Imereti. 'Review of the Abkhazian and Samurzaq'anoan Churches in 1870. Journey-notes', Newspaper *Kavkaz*, 20 November, 1870, No. 136.

²⁷TsGA of the Abkhazian ASSR, fund 57, deed 10, part 5, p. 16.

one of the milk-brethren stayed living with him. They were the ones who preserved until death the blooded shirt of Sowlah^W, who died in battle, and his hair, which they took with them to the grave.

A mother's milk was seen as the symbol of purity and holiness. According to folk-belief, it is endowed with priceless, immense power and has the property of 'burning' anyone who transgressed its holiness. The curse from the lips of a wet-nurse: 'May no benefit accrue to you from my milk!' was considered the gravest of all. 'One thimbleful of a mother's milk carries greater weight than the load of a family of mules', they say amongst the people. Out of fear of unwittingly transgressing the custom according to which marriages between milk-kin are absolutely prohibited and afraid of 'profaning the breast-milk', Abkhazians, in the words of several sources, avoided marrying a girl from the same village. They give preference to marriages contracted with persons from distant places. Marriage-ties between neighbours, although encountered, are nevertheless deemed to be undesirable.

Atalychestvo and milk-kinship cannot be fully identified one with the other. It is possible to be milk-kin and not to have any relations pertaining specifically to fosterage. Among the Abkhazians it often transpired that women had for this or that reason (e.g. the death of an infant's mother) to breast-feed, even just the once, children of a different family. This was enough to prevent marriage between the respective families, who thereby became milk-kin. In this way over the course of time many residents of a village or hamlet could find themselves drawn into milk-kinship one with another, which, as stated, entailed a taboo on marriage. This has nothing to do, of course, with exogamy or even *atalychestvo* in the strict sense. The decisive point here is the provision of a woman's milk, from which flows an interdiction on the marriage between the respective persons related through co-suckling.

Mutual defence of a woman's honour was one of the holiest duties laid upon both sides by the fact of fostering, adoption or contractual kinship. The profanation of milk-kinship through sexual relations was unheard of, or, in any event, the most serious crime against custom, and those who transgressed this custom were punished heavily and mercilessly. In this connection one cannot help recalling the content of one of the œvres of Georgian classical literature -- Ak'ak'i Ts'ereteli's beautiful poem 'The Fosterer', which was based on Abkhazian ethnographical material. As the subtitle informs us, it tells of an incident which actually took place. The author, by masterfully depicting the power of the ties of *atalychestvo*, raised the general idea of the fostering of man by man to the great heights of philosophical generalisation. Readers, naturally, remember the unforgettable lines at the end of the poem. With enormously effective power they tell of how a fosterer, grown wise on the experiences of life, was angered at the news of a crime committed by his foster-child who sacrilegiously dared to rape the beautiful wife of his milk-brother. The remorseful foster-child knelt before him with

bared breast. The force of the moral blow experienced by the *atalyk* was too much, and the old mountaineer in his anger could easily have loosed off a bullet into the heart of the young man who had shamed his good name. But the *atalyk* decided differently: the wise mentor, sensing his own responsibility, decided that the one most deserving of death was himself, insofar as he had been unable properly to bring up the person, and right there committed suicide²⁸.

It is reported that the daughter of the ruler of Abkhazia was made pregnant by his kinsman, Gr. Chachba, who, in order to hide the traces of his crime, gave poison to, and killed, his victim. Then the fosterer of the girl, the nobleman Hasan Maan, at the head of a strong band of Dzhigets, attacked and ravaged the estates of Gr. Chachba in T'amsh and Atara. He himself for 40 days did not leave the grave of his foster-child, who was committed to earth in the monastery at Myk^W.

Together with T'at'ash Marshan in the capacity of his 'gandal' [?'travel-companion', perhaps from Mingrelian *gila.gandar.i* 'wanderer' -- Translator] Shmaf Adzinba (village of DzhgJar^{da}) was fostered in the home of Q'azax^W Ash^Wba. Subsequently, the son of Shmaf married the granddaughter of Q'azax^W, and this, being an illicit marriage according to custom, produced a storm of indignation on the part of the young folks' relatives. 'In ancient times they would surely have killed such a groom,' the informant explained.

If the bonds of *atalychestvo* too were ever transgressed, then this was done least of all by the peasants, who were steadfast upholders of the traditional law of the people -- as opposed to the noblemen and princes, who often had no qualms about anything in the struggle for their own self-serving ends. Thus, according to the story of the old man Bak Dbar (village of Merkula [Mark^W'yla]), one day Shardyn Zh^Wanba, a nobleman of Pak^Wash, stole the cattle of the peasant 'sons of Sharmat', who were dependent on the Mark^W'yla nobleman Hasan Maan. Hasan caught up with, and killed, Shardyn. Fearing a feud, the people of Mark^W'yla abandoned their village and came to the Achba princes of Myk^W, seeking their protection. The Zh^Wanbas laid waste Mark^W'yla, which had been left empty. Hasan was hiding in the forest. One day he decided to make an appeal to the ruler, who at that time was overseeing the removal of wood from his Gindze-Etsera plantation. Hasan came there, and the prince's men offered him work.

'I am not, like you, in service to the ruler,' Hasan said to them.

Hearing of this, the ruler ordered him to be thrashed. And, indeed, someone gave him a blow. Then Hasan presented himself before the ruler himself and began to prance about on his horse in the courtyard, having the intention of shooting the ruler, but the latter did not show himself. From there Hasan came to the ruler's groom, G^Wadzhaa.

²⁸ Ak'ak'i Ts'ereteli 'Selected Writings in One Volume', Tbilisi 1935, p. 169 [in Georgian].

'Hasan, you've no doubt been with the ruler -- how are they getting on?' G^Wadzhaa asked.

'Yes, I've been with him, and here's the answer that he sent you!' exclaimed Hasan, shooting the groom on the spot.

The ruler decided to do away with Hasan and charged his nobleman, Beslan Lak'rba, with this task. The latter, in his turn, involved Princess Des Achba in this business. So that Hasan should have no suspicions, Des adopted Hasan, after which he frequently visited her home and felt himself quite free there. One day, when expecting Hasan, the perfidious Des summoned his enemy, Sasryq^W'a Zvanba, and concealed him in her house. She gave him the chance of killing Hasan, despite the fact that the latter had been adopted by her.

According to legend, a certain Salybej Achba had 19 wet-nurses, with 18 of whom he had intimate relations. At length, the youngest wet-nurse made an appointment for a rendezvous with him at night in a barn, the upper floor of which she had previously dismantled. When Salybej slipped in at the appointed hour, he went through the floor and fell among butting bulls. The bulls butted Salybej to death. The people assembled, and folk said: 'The 18 oldest wet-nurses allowed him to trick them, but you, the youngest wet-nurse, turn out to be the one heroine amongst them -- you've been proven right!'

In 1951 such a tale as the following was recorded in the settlement of Anx^Wa from the words of Q'ansaw Tarkj'yl:

'Up to the present day,' said Q'ansaw Mamsyr-Ipa, 'we have not infrequently used in conversation the name Awblaa. If, for instance, a person flinches through fear of something, then they say to him: "You so shake for your life that it's as though the spirit of Awblaa himself resided in you!". They deemed this Awblaa to be so great a man. He was once the ruler of the southern and northern Caucasus (?). He had no children, but finally a daughter was born to him. Learning of this, a person presented himself to him and requested he be allowed the honour of fostering the daughter. Awblaa agreed. The *atalyk* fostered her for 15 years, and she turned out to be a beautiful and renowned girl. She was so beautiful that even the *atalyk* (evidently led astray by the devil) couldn't resist and planned to have his way with her. Defiled by this, the girl determined to do away with herself. Then an attempt was made by the *atalyk*'s group quickly to hush up the affair, for they all feared that she would report this to her terrible father and decided to avoid this. They knocked up a large trunk, placed her inside it and cast it into the sea. The *atalyk*, however, came to her father and announced that his 'а.х^Wа.р^ка had disappeared. A year passed, and they laid on a memorial feast for the girl, but for all this the father never abandoned thoughts of finding his daughter. One day he gathered together the people and took counsel as to what was to be done.

"Journey through all the lands of the Caucasus! Everywhere you'll be received with honour and entertained in worthy fashion. But nowhere touch any food until each one of the distinguished and worldly-wise individuals whom they will assemble to meet you relates everything they have seen

or heard; it is impossible that among all these tales you will not hear something about the fate of your daughter!" the wise folk said to him.

'Awblaa did as they said and quickly set off on his journey.

'The fate of his daughter turned out thus: the waves cast up on the shore the trunk in which she was incarcerated. A youth, out hunting at the time with his friends around these parts, noticed the trunk and dragged it out of the water; they then took the girl home on a stretcher. She speedily came to and even got better. To all the questions about her adventures she replied out of shame that she remembered nothing. But this proved no hindrance to the growing fame of the beauty. "God has brought happiness to your son by sea," the youth's circle would say to the father. And, indeed, the young ones soon married. They lived well and peacefully. But one day over some misdemeanour the husband reproached her with these words: "No-one would have acted like that apart from one without family and tribe, one who has been delivered by the water's tide!".

"You are awfully mistaken -- I am the daughter of Awblaa, and sooner or later he will despite all try to find me!" she replied.

'The husband and his relatives were startled at this revelation. "It'll turn out badly for us, if Awblaa discovers his daughter with us," they said and decided to convey her without delay to her father. They seated her in a carriage and, accompanied by the husband's milk-brother and several honoured persons, they despatched her home to her father. During the journey the husband's milk-brother also felt an irresistible attraction to her and openly declared as much then and there.

"God! what have I done to deserve all this?" she exclaimed and then sprang from the carriage and hid in a gorge. The escorts couldn't find her and returned home.

'She, however, dressed in satin and silk, went off wandering through the gorge. At last, she met a shepherd. "What can have brought a woman here?" thought the shepherd in alarm.

"Don't be afraid! -- I too am human," she said and asked him to exchange clothes with her. She donned the shepherd's clothing and went further on. She met once more another shepherd and spent the night with him at his camp, but the shepherd did not suspect that it was a woman who was lying beside him. On his advice she went and applied for work as a shepherd with a rich landlord.

'Soon her father also arrived there, continuing his fruitless search for his daughter. The landlord arranged a great feast for the guests. They laid the table, but before sitting down, the main guest announced that he would not eat even a piece until all present had related in sequence everything they had seen or heard. Awblaa heard much here too by way of interesting histories, but not a word about his daughter.

'At this moment she came in and right away recognised her *atalyk*, who was accompanying Awblaa as a decoy.

"If you'll permit a simple peasant, I too would like to offer a true story for your attention," she volunteered and related the whole of her own history.

'Thus did Awblaa at long last meet up with his lovely daughter. He then and there despatched a herald to his son-in-law, who had saved his daughter's life, and once more united the loving couple. As for what to do with the milk-brother of the husband and his daughter's *atalyk*, he left that to the

discretion of the people, and the people condemned them to be shot. The son of the daughter of the renowned Awblaa became *а.пс.'тә* -- the founder and ruler of Abkhazia, the progenitor of all Abkhazians.'

Thus did this legend end.

From the words of centenarian Sulejman Arshba (village of Tkvarcheli [T'q^W'archal]) was recorded in 1948 the following tale about the fate of those who transgressed the bond of adoptive kinship.

Arzak'an Axan-Ipa, as a result of some quarrel, killed a certain Azhgeri. At this time the wife of the latter was in the family-way and shortly gave birth to a son, whom they named Kuchuku [K^Wych'yk^W]. The lad was already about 15, but still he knew nothing about his father's death. One day his coevals reproached him for not having avenged his father. K^Wych'yk^W rushed off to his mother and forced her, despite her best efforts to resist, to speak of the circumstances of his father's demise. Having discovered what had happened, K^Wych'yk^W began a feud with the Axan-Ipas. These latter sent a delegation and managed to secure his agreement to touch with his lips the breast of their mother, by which he became their milk-brother. K^Wych'yk^W turned out to be a powerful fellow. The Axan-Ipa brothers -- there were five of them -- began seriously to fear his influence and decided to destroy him. They sat him one day on an unbroken horse; he fell off it and broke his leg. 'A cripple can't cause us any trouble,' the brothers decided and didn't bring him any doctor or bone-setter. K^Wych'yk^W guessed their intentions and one day, leaning on a stick, secretly slipped away from them. Reaching home, he asked his mother to bind up his leg. K^Wych'yk^W soon recovered and began to pursue the killers of his father, his enemies. One day he blocked their path and slew all five brothers. Going up the nearest mountain, he killed five mountain-goats, took them to where the dead Axan-Ipa brothers were lying, stood over them and said: 'To your souls I dedicate these pure creatures, to you who made a brother of me!'. And to finish he added: 'And the blood of Azhgeri is hereby avenged.'

Both sides linked by *atalychestvo* took an active part in questions relating to the marriage of their members... It happened that a foster-child would stay living in the family of the foster-parents up to marriage, as we saw in the example of Xabyg^W Achba, who lived up to marriageable age with his *atalyk* D. Ax^Wba (village of Ch'lou). Then the fosterers would take upon themselves concerns over the wedding of their '*а.х^Wа.птә*. If he had to abduct the bride, then this dangerous task he would entrust, principally, to his milk-brothers. The foster-parents took an active part in the organisation of the wedding by means of personal work and material offerings. If a foster-daughter got married, the foster-parents would take part in the putting together of the dowry, sometimes also involving even bond-women, and the milk-brother would escort her on the day of her departure as a bride.

According to the description of K'onst'ant'ine Mach'avariani, 'Wet-nurses watch over their foster-sons for life and their foster-daughters up to their very death. They and their relatives of both sexes experience powerful anxieties when their ward takes on the

role of fiancé in order that they should not "spoil" him. Spoiling consisted of evil people possibly being able to "deprive the fiancé of his matrimonial faculties" by means of different whisperings or amulets or knots in handkerchiefs. These whisperings occur at the time of the fiancé's approach to the bride's lodging²⁹.

If the 'ax^wap^ha was a girl, the *atalyk*'s group took care not only of her entry into wedlock but also of the fate of her children after marriage. In the event of the death of a foster-daughter [N.B. the text says 'wet-nurse'], they would regularly take in and foster her children in the self-same group. 'My mother Tsisa was from the Chachbas of Bedia,' recalled 80 year-old K^w'atsia Marshan (born in the settlement of G^wyp). 'She was fostered right there by representatives of two noble families -- Gartskia and Gurgulia [G^wyrg^wylia]. I lost my mother early, and so they then raised me too; I was with them for 2-3 years, and then they conducted me to my father, after which they took me back to their home. And it was they who decided upon a name for me.'

Alxas Achba (village of Achandara) had a single son from his first wife who took his fiancée from the Marshans of Dal. The groom set out with his suite to fetch his wife. On their path the suite was invited to Eshera by the Dzapsh-Ipa princes, where during the banquet the groom was accidentally killed. The suite had to make their way back, and a message was conveyed to Dal about the sad incident that had occurred. Time passed. The fosterers of the deceased's father did not want that their 'ax^wap^ha should remain without issue. One day they assembled and said to him: 'Saddle up a horse and let's go, only, we beg you, don't ask where and why!'. They took the unsuspecting Achba, virtually already an old man, and came to the Marshans in Dal. The oldest of the escorts stood there and declared: 'You are aware that the fiancé of your daughter has perished and that he had no brothers. But we have no wish that the family of our 'ax^wap^ha should die out. If possible, cede to us your daughter -- she has come into our possession in any case -- only now for the father of her dead fiancé. Here he is, our new fiancé!', he finished and shewed the aged fiancé to her relatives. The men took counsel amongst themselves and assented. Thus did the aged Achba take as wife his son's bride. From this union three children were born to him, of whom Alxas was the youngest.

As we already know, Jak^wyb Ax^wba, the father of Dzhyr, fostered Prince Xabyg^w Achba up to marriageable age. When Xabyg^w went on his first solo trip from the village of Ch'lou to Ochamchira, his *atalyks* decided with joy that their ward was already a 'real man' and in his honour arranged a banquet for him. The Ax^wbas built for Xabyg^w his first house, helped him acquire a homestead, married him off to a daughter of the nobleman K^w'adzhi Maan of Ilori [Jalyr], whom they themselves

²⁹K.D. Machavariani 'Travel Itinerary through the Mountains of Sukhum and the Sukhum District'. Sukhum, 1913, p. 318.

journeyed to view, and at their own expense arranged the wedding. In a word, they created for him a name and were everywhere at his side.

According to legend, Muxar Amch'ba came one day from Kabarda to Prince Achba of Myk^W and proposed to the latter that he give his daughter to his ward, Prince Marshan. Achba agreed, sent an invitation to Prince Marshan, gave him his daughter, and on top of that gave as much land as the latter was able to traverse on horseback in a single day. In the tale 'The Prince and the Daughter of a Pauper' it is exactly like this that the milk-brothers are earnestly occupied with finding a bride for their ruler, who has left marrying till late³⁰.

As has been observed, the ward too, for his part, actively participated in the marriage-arrangements of his milk-kin. Thus, if a milk-brother was fetching a wife covertly or by abduction, then not infrequently the ward would take the leading role in this enterprise. If the relatives of the girl pursued him with the aim of getting her away from the abductors, then the ward of the fiancé along with his companions did everything possible with the aid of words and maybe even weapons in order that the pursuers should not succeed in reclaiming the bride; for, until all this business was satisfactorily settled, the ward kept the bride of his milk-brother in his own home. When the milk-brother brought his wife in a peaceful manner or the milk-sister got married, the ward played the role of the main supporter. To the bride of his milk-brother he would usually give a horse and, at the moment of the removal of the veil from her face, some money³¹.

Here is another case of a similar sort from the start of the twentieth century. The nobleman Almasxan Atumaaa was in a relationship of 'a.x^Wa.pka with the neighbouring Prince Babyz Agrba (settlement of G^Wyp). The young Babyz took a fancy to a girl from the village of Arasadzyx. One day, Babyz came to Almasxan and said that his bride was being taken off by another fiancé who enjoyed the protection of the noble Maans. Almasxan, without giving the matter a second thought, assembled a band of devotees, fell upon by night the suite of the fiancé, sent them all packing, but took the fiancé himself and the bride prisoner and let them out of their home-arrest only after a week, saying: 'Now I no longer consider that my milk-brother Babyz has been disgraced.'

The negative, heavy and ruinous consequences that flowed for the peasants from the relationship of *atalychestvo* manifested themselves especially clearly, if you will allow, on the occasions of the death of wards. The death of a ward was felt to be a misfortune for the fosterers. The sincerity and depth of their grief were indescribable. By custom, at the wailing they (both men and women) would go barefoot at any time of

³⁰ K.S. Shaq'ryl & X.S. Bghazh^Wba *Abkhazian Stories*, vol. I, Sukhum, 1940, p. 373.

³¹ P'et're Ch'araia. *op. cit.* 'Iveria' [in Georgian], 1888, No. 173.

the year and in mourning-garb. Women would keen heart-rendingly, torture themselves, disfigure their faces to the point of non-recognition, so that the deep scratches from their nails would sometimes not heal for a whole year. Men too would mercilessly beat themselves around the neck (over their heads) to produce blood with special lashes having broad bits of strap on the end (a.'ʒəla.ms or a.'tʃəla.ms) or, in the testimony of others, would beat their heads with the horns of creatures. Members of the family of the fosterers would not emerge for 40 days from the ward's 'a.nʃə.n (an effigy made out of the clothing and weapons of the deceased) and would often lie down in front of it on damp ground. Then the family from which the ward came did not have the right to wear the usual mourning-garb (black calico) at other nearby deaths, to rend their clothing and hair, to scratch their faces, or to go barefoot. For their close dead they would wear as a sign of mourning simple black chintz.

Here are the words used to describe all this by K'onst'ant'ine Mach'avariani, who more than once was himself an eye-witness of the dreadful scene of the frenzied self-flagellation of the *atalyk* and his relatives on the occasion of the death of a ward. He writes:

There were occasions when milk-brothers, having learnt of the death of their mother's foster-son, would take their own lives. At the wailing heart-rending scenes took place: men landed blows about their own face and chest, and went around, as if in a daze, bare-headed, shedding bitter tears. Women would tear their hair, scratch their face and breasts till they fetched blood, and in paroxysms of overpowering grief hit their heads against rocks. As a mark of mourning men would not cut their hair for a period of three years, whilst women would wear a harsh type of mourning-garb made out of black or even yellow coarse fabric. After 40 days the forty-day memorial feast took place, and after a year they performed the anniversary feast. At the time of the latter items belonging to the deceased would be laid out in the home of the dead man or woman, and over them a wailing would again be performed. A part of the day was dedicated also to horse-races and recited memories of the prowess of the deceased. Near the items of a dead man stood the deceased's horse in mourning attire with his weapons hung over the saddle³².

At the time of the bewailing and at the memorial feast of a prince there stood a person 'from the best of the peasants' in mourning vestments alongside the deceased's horse on display, holding the bridle (a.'tʃə.d.gəla.ra). This exhibition of the horse, the reckless racing (a.ta.r.'tʃəj) and so forth appear to be remnants of the sacrifice of the steed (and maybe of a person too) to the deceased.

The valuable possessions left behind by the dead 'a.x'wə.pʃə were distributed among the milk-brothers and sisters. Thus, for example, Sowlah Maan (uncle of KJychyp Maan) was fostered in the Dzhyk'yrba family (village of Myg'wydzyrx'wa), and when he died, they gave his sabre to his milk-brothers. This sabre, in the words of KJ'ag'wys

³²K.D. Machavariani 'Travel Itinerary through the Mountains of Sukhum and the Sukhum District'. Sukhum, 1913, p. 318-9.

Dzhyk'yriba, is preserved by them to this day. But it also happened, for instance, as follows: Dzadzik^W'yr Achba, who lost his relatives early on, remained until he came of age with his fosterers, the peasants Shynk^W'ba (settlement of Ch'lou). He too died there, and his fosterers arranged for him a wailing, buried him in their family-grave at their own expense, and celebrated for him the memorial feast also. Then the Achba princes of Ch'lou (distant relatives of the deceased) came and speeded up the division amongst themselves of the property left behind by the deceased (the patriarchal home, etc.), and they also took his weapons (ა.^Wჩ^Wათქა). This was in the second half of the 19th century.

According to the words of the aged Jak'aterina Dzapsh-Ipa, when her father Sowlah (village of K'aldax^Wara) died, the fosterers of the latter from those bearing the surname Bartsyts subjected themselves to torture for several days, and one of the milk-sisters, Dakj'a Bartsyts, even decided to lay hands upon herself in brutal fashion. And the men as a mark of mourning disfigured themselves thus: they cleanly shaved not only their heads and beards but also their eyebrows. And this was at a time when to shave the beard was deemed unworthy of a man. Evidently connected with this custom are the words of the curse which can often be heard on the lips of women: 'Would that you shaved your head (wa.'xə wa.'s.a.a.jt')!'.

Hadzharat Amch'ba, a resident of Dzhglarda, invited the daughter of Prince T'at'ash Marshan, allowed her 'to touch' the breast of his wife, and in this way became bonded to her through the ties of milk-kinship. She died, and they did not bury her for almost a week -- they were awaiting the arrival of relatives from Svanetia (the mother of the deceased being a Dadeshkeliani [the historical royal family of Svanetia -- Translator]). All this time Hadzharat ate nothing and drank not even a mouthful of water. When, finally, they returned from the funeral, Hadzharat, weakened to the extreme, could not even manage to make any noticeable movement from his seat. Arriving just in time, Iv. Amch'ba gave him support and handed him water, but not even at this time did he start to drink, merely rinsing out his mouth and then spitting it out. As a mark of mourning he let his hair grow on his head for a whole year and went around with plaits like a woman. 'Trimming his hair' he permitted only to the mother of his dead 'ax^Wაქა, since, as long as any of them lived, he had no wish to become related to anyone else.

When Bazryq^W'a Achba (village of Ch'lou) died, his *atalyk*, the peasant Azhgeri Dzhop'ua, did not touch meat for five years. For all of these five years going up in the summer to the mountain-pastures with a flock of nanny-goats, he took with him a special pot for the cooking of beans (under normal circumstances this was considered even shameful, for shepherds never cooked beans in the mountains, eating only meat with milk-products). The wife of Azhgeri too, after the death of their 'ax^Wაქა, generally gave up the pleasure of eating meat and maintained this harsh self-punishment

till the end of her life. Only her daughter-in-law, the wife of her blood-son, did not maintain it, holding out for a year; but then she let her mother-in-law know that she was no longer in a fit state to endure starvation. The latter did not like this: 'Let her eat fish so that she chokes on it!' she said, thereby allowing her to supplement her meagre diet with just one fish.

The peasant Jazhga Grigolia (village of K^Waldax^Wara) fostered Tatlastan Shaq'ryl from the class of domestic serfs (jina.q'ma) (settlement of Lyxny). When Tatlastan died, they delivered from the *atalyk's* group a sacrificial bull with a special mourning coverlet thrown over it (a.ta.r.'t[aj]); the bull was adorned additionally with sweets, bread-rolls, etc.

In 1909 in the village of K^Wyt'ol the peasant Step'an Xardzhelia laid on a grandiose memorial feast for his dead brother. At this feast, as the 102 year-old Step'an Xardzhelia himself confirmed, there was present a mass of people from almost all the Abzhywa [central Abkhazian] communities, as well as many folk from Bzyp [northern] and Samurzaq'anoan [southern] Abkhazia, and also from Odishi [Mingrelia]. According to his very own testimony, he alone was unable with the means available to him to cope with a feast on such a scale, which demanded tremendous effort and expenditure. 'Dzhansyx^W helped me arrange this,' said Step'an. Dzhansyx^W Dzapsh-Ipa was grandson of the ward of Step'an's ancestors. And lo, at the memorial feast of one of the descendants of the fosterer of his grandfather, Dzhansyx^W delivered the following animals, draping over them broad satin-coverlets: a bull, a horse, and a yoke of buffaloes. These buffaloes they presented to the one who took first prize in the memorial horse-races. In the races seven horses received prizes. For these prizes 14 different kinds of animals were handed out, including the horse of the deceased with saddle and his weapons. That the selfsame Step'an Xardzhelia went on to relate:

Prince Iv. Gr. Chachba unexpectedly died in Sukhum. Learning of this, many Abzhywans went there, some on horseback, others on foot. I was escorting Chychyn Dzapsh-Ipa. We encountered the mourning procession by the small town of Dacha. From there they despatched several powerful horsemen at full gallop to the village of T'amsh to organise people for the reception and to set up weepers, men separately from the women. It was March, and the weather was cold and rainy, mixed with snow. The Chachbas and some other princes journeyed grandly in phaëton-carriages. There were then no vehicles and bridges in Abkhazia, and one had to wade across rivers. At one spot Chychyn said to me: 'The phaëtons are sinking; climb into the water and help the horses to pull the gentlefolk out.' 'Can't you see how cold it is, then?' I answered him. The phaëton of His Highness Aleksandr Chachba, brother of the deceased, drove up. Then Chychyn earnestly entreated me: 'Should it cost you your life,' he said, 'clamber into the water -- anything else is shameful and awkward.' 'If you climb in, so will I,' I again tried to reply. But I didn't get a chance to finish speaking before he was already up to the waist in the freezing water, and after him me too. While we were pulling at the phaëton, Aleksandr, turning to Chychyn, declared: 'How much trouble we've

caused you too!' Chychyn, for his part, replied: 'Don't worry yourself about us -- better had we never seen this day!' But I said under my breath: 'Would that I never set eyes on either of you again!'.

When we arrived at T'amsh, a mass of people were already gathered there. Many peasants were wailing. Some were such idiots in those days as to wail even for parasites. Beholding this scene, K^w'atsia, another brother of Ivan, was morosely muttering something to himself, pacing up and down. Xabyg^wAchba went up to him and asked whether he wanted anything there. In reply K^w'atsia remarked: 'If I had the power, I'd put all this lot under arrest for three months. One person has died, and they, it seems, are ready to tear themselves to pieces. Are they really actually going to turn into human beings at this stage?!' 'What are you on about, you old donkey,' his brother Aleksandr answered him, 'what are they supposed to do? -- we are their wards after all ('k.əb.rə: 'r.ə.mə.j)'.
'

They placed the coffin together with the deceased in the church, whilst the people went their separate ways for the night's lodging to the neighbouring villages. Abas K'oghonia, for example, issued invitations to a score of persons, all noblemen and princes. 'All these are relatives of the deceased, and they are hardly going to eat meat, but how am I going to sit such guests down to a meal of grits with beans?!' were the householder's nervous remarks. Observing this, one of the guests pulled out 30 roubles and handed them to Abas, saying: 'Go and buy somewhere close by a decent bullock for meat.' 'I thought you wouldn't be eating meat, but there'll be something we can lay our hands on at my place to slaughter,' he said to the householder. 'What's with you -- do you suppose we're starving that we're about to eat beans?! Ivan didn't die from eating meat, and so why shouldn't we eat it?!'

If someone died from the kin-group of the *atalyk*, then the ward was also obliged by custom to grieve for him, to don mourning-garb, to grow his hair and to perform the established rites and ceremonies at the time of the wailing and funeral of the deceased. The ward took upon himself the expenses for the funerals of dead fosterers and made arrangements for the burial. In the event of the death of the wet-nurse or her husband, the ward was obliged by custom to order on his own account a fine coffin and funerary shroud appropriate to it. Such details were characteristic. Some paid their wet-nurses a special honour: they ordered from master-goldsmiths a special golden or silver ornament in the shape of a woman's breast: laying her to rest with a golden breast signalled a demonstration of respect and an appreciation of a ward's debt to his milk-mother. These cowls they covered from inside with silk-material and laid them on the breast of the deceased, a chain around the neck holding them in place.

On the day of the memorial feast wards provided a sacrificial cow in honour of their foster-mother, and in honour of the *atalyk* they delivered a bull, sometimes covered by a mourning coverlet: the head of the bull was ornamented by metal (zinc, etc.) cowls in the form of horns, mostly on occasions when from the *atalyk*'s group an animal was delivered by way of a 'sacrifice to the soul' of a deceased ward. These sacrificial

animals were named 'a gift to the soul of the deceased' (ა.'p̄s̄.a.ta.t^W'). Sometimes they also delivered to the funeral a horse (if the dead person did not have one). This horse with saddle and weaponry was put on display at the place of the wailing and was held by the bridle (ა.'t̄ʒ̄.a.d.ḡa.l̄a.r̄a) by one of the close-relatives, and sometimes by the dead person's 'a.x^Wa.p̄k̄a himself.

Finally, it is necessary to refer once more to one of the most important moments characteristic of the mutual relations of kin by *atalychestvo*. This moment consists of the fact that milk-brothers, risking their lives, would avenge the blood of their ward, whilst the latter too, for his part, by custom was obliged to defend them in the event of injury or insult inflicted by anyone and even to take vengeance for them. Thus, for example, injuring anyone's blood-brother meant, according to traditional ways of thinking, that the ward himself was insulted. And so, any defendant knew in advance that he would be answerable for his offence, not only before the aggrieved individuals, but in equal measure before their milk-kin.

Nevertheless, one has to underline that in connection with this so-called 'mutual assistance' in blood-feuds, and other similar affairs, the side of the good old *atalyk*, the peasantry, again suffered incomparably more, as one would expect.

The tragic fate of a peasant in pre-Revolutionary Abkhazia was very artfully portrayed and in full conformity with reality by Dmitry I. Gulia [D̄am̄n̄əjt̄' G^Wal̄əj̄a] in his wonderful tale 'Under a Foreign Sky', written in 1918. It tells of how a young peasant, a prince's milk-brother, was sent into permanent exile, where he pined away and soon died in the prime of his life, for an offence committed by the latter. His name was Elq'an:

One day, Elq'an was summoned by the wife of a prince and horse-rustler, who said: 'Yesterday your 'a.x^Wa.p̄k̄a was encountered by someone who, recognising he was riding his horse, made a complaint to the authorities. At that point my husband made reference to you. Now it's up to you: either ruin him over a vile little horse or save him! Well now, the head-magistrate is sitting in the hall -- go to him and give him whatever evidence you want. If ultimately it turns out badly, your 'a.x^Wa.p̄k̄a will try to ensure that you don't die over a rotten steed.' Elq'an, generally bewildered by the cunning princess, decided, it seems, that he had no choice: if he didn't confess to the prince's misdemeanour, then he would still suffer none the less. So he was compelled to rescue the prince, and this rashness cost the wretched Elq'an his very life. He did not live to see the freedom which the Revolution brought, destroying the bourgeois and landowning regime, which was so cursed by the old mother of the tale's hero, who died of sorrow.

According to custom, the killing of a member of the kin-group of an enemy-*atalyk* released a blood-foe from a feud in relation to the respective nobleman or prince, i.e. the direct offender or wrong-doer. And blood-foes were most likely to adopt this course, as it was easier to take vengeance for one's wrath on defenceless peasants.

Thus, the ancient feudalised tradition often brought about the actual deaths of many persons who were entirely innocent of any crime.

Social origin generally played a great role in the matter of blood-vengeance. If, for instance, a prince killed a peasant, then the relatives of the latter had no right to take revenge for the dead person's blood on the killer, for, as was said: 'The blood of a peasant is not equal to that of a prince.' And so, in place of the homicidal prince his fosterer had to answer for the blood he had spilled³³.

In one deed of the Land Commission, specifically in the evidence of residents of the settlement of Duripsh -- peasants Max^W, K^Watash and Kamash T^W'anba -- one reads that their ancestor was on good terms with Bezhan Lak'rba and was fosterer to one of his children, thus coming under the protection of Lak'rba, and he paid him peasant-service 20 years ago. One of Bezhan's grandsons, Solomon, quarrelling with one of the Lak'rbas, Levan, of the Q^W'lanyrx^Wa line, killed Chacha T^W'anba. Since Chacha was killed in a quarrel with Solomon, the T^W'anbas demanded satisfaction from this latter and, not having received it, they left the patronage of Lak'rba and gave up paying him *ა.ჭა.ძ* 'pasturage-tithe'. The T^W'anbas in Duripsh amount in all to 12 households, and they are all related to one another and no longer pay any duties to anyone -- with the exception of Dzhg^Wyt T^W'anba, who pays the *ა.ნ.ა.უა*-dues, i.e. he pays a nanny-goat and kid, to Solomon Lak'rba for the maid he took as wife³⁴.

From this, it is true, not entirely clear document it would appear that the nobleman Solomon Lak'rba, quarrelling with one of his own kinsmen, killed the peasant Chacha T^W'anba: this, from the viewpoint of the customary laws of vendetta, can be explained only by the fact that the murdered person belonged to the family of the fosterer of that Lak'rba with whom the first one found himself at odds.

No matter how the landowners might quarrel among themselves, they often found common cause at the expense of the peasants. Thus, we read in a document:

11th October 1853. Because of illiteracy, I, Prince Zurab Tlans-Ipa Emuxvari [Jamx^War], have set below my cross and thus give my signature to you, Tag^W Zurab-Ipa Anchabadze, in assurance of the fact that, although your personal possessions, the peasants Tik^W'a and Madzhi, were sold, I, since they were my fosterers, went to them, redeemed them and gained control of them. Henceforth we are reconciled between us, and I have satisfaction from you; for this reason do I hereby give you the said peasants, and no-one has the right to take issue with you, nor shall I ever say that they were redeemed by me and thus belong to me -- in testimony of this I set down my cross. Prince Aslanbej Emuxvari and ensign K'atsia Margania of the Samurzaq'an Oral Court bore witness to this³⁵.

³³M. Dzhanashvili 'Abkhazia and the Abkhazians', ZKOIRGO [Records of the Caucasian Section of the Imperial Russian Geographical Society], Tiflis, 1894, book XVI, p. 12.

³⁴TsGA of the Abkhazian ASSR, fund 57, deed 5, p. 126.

³⁵*Ibid.* p. 62.

K^W'atsia Marshan related, the following:

Peasant Tarx^Wyna Basaria pastured his herd at my place in K^W'achara. One day with the aim of making off with the herd P'lat'on Emuxvari attacked him with a group of his men. When Tarx^Wyna began to put up resistance, P'lat'on wounded him and fled with his comrades. Tarx^Wyna, bleeding, went after them. When they passed me the news that my milk-brother had been wounded, I mounted up and set off in pursuit of the perpetrators but could not catch them up. Then I galloped off to P'lat'on's maternal uncle, K^Wyych Ch'k'ot'ua [tʃ'k'w'ət'əwə] (village of K^W'achara), with whom the malefactor lived. There I found the blood-covered Tarx^Wyna lying on the balcony. I made haste and began to search for P'lat'on in every nook and cranny, but he was nowhere to be seen, having succeeded in going to ground. At that moment the master of the house, Prince K^Wyych Ch'k'ot'ua, came out on the balcony. I rushed up to him, snatched his dagger, and, without giving him time to collect his wits, wounded him, carried off his milk-brother and galloped away. Then this affair produced a noisy aftermath. Many people found themselves drawn into it. In order to patch things up, people gathered sometimes here, sometimes there, almost without pause for two weeks. The matter was aggravated also by the fact that after ten days Tarx^Wyna died of the injury received. In the end they managed to turn the affair towards reconciliation. P'lat'on's father, Aleksej Emuxvari (village of Myk^W), had to adopt little Afrik'an (today he is living in Tbilisi), the son of Tarx^Wyna. I, for my part, invited to my home, also by way of adoption, K^Wyych Ch'k'ot'ua, whom I had wounded -- I permitted him to touch the breast of my wife, presented him with five horses, and I also gave five stallions to his escorts, since amongst the latter were such influential persons as Xabyg^W Achba, Zorbak Dzapsh-Ipa, T'at'ash Marshan and others. After this, K^Wyych and I became relatives and friends.

As has been stated, whoever could injure the milk-brother of his enemy was deemed to have completely fulfilled his feud-obligation. According to the information of centenarian Tamshyg^W Kap'ba (village of Arasadzyx), once every year the peasants, noblemen and even some princes had to present themselves to Prince Uchardia Dzapsh-Ipa (village of Txina) and take his hand in greeting. Daltyq^W'a Marshan refused to do this. By way of seeking vengeance over this injury (lack of recognition), Prince Dzapsh-Ipa shot a cow belonging to Daltyq^W'a's milk-brother, whilst the latter, in turn, avenging his milk-brother, shot in reply a cow belonging to the self-same Dzapsh-Ipa.

The old man Badra Avidzba recounted the following:

The K^J'ax^Jba peasants of Eshera were regarded as the fosterers of the Dzapsh-Ipa princes, with whom they long lived as neighbours. One day a resident of the very same village, Dahair Avidzba, struck G^Jaldach K^J'ax^Jba. Perceiving the injury to his milk-brother as an insult to himself, G^Wyd Dzapsh-Ipa openly gave Dahair a thrashing. The Avidzbas, in their turn, deemed themselves to have been disgraced by the actions of the prince and summoned him to an oath-swearing. Compelled to assent, G^Wyd swore an oath at a sacred smithy with the following content: 'If what had happened to me had happened to you, and if you had reacted like me, then I swear by this sacred

smithy that I would not have judged this to be an insult to myself! He had with him nine fellow-oath-givers -- seven peasants, a nobleman and a prince.

When 15 year-old Aleksandr Inal-Ipa heard that his *atalyk*, the fearless and cruel X^Wyt Ajba from the village of Otxara, had been killed, he hastened from his school in Tbilisi (where he was studying in the 1880s), came secretly to Abkhazia, investigated all the details surrounding the death of his milk-father, and with his own hand shot a near-relative of Prince Q'araman Inal-Ipa, the instigator and cunning accomplice of Ajba's murder. Regardless of the fact that Q'araman was related to Aleksandr, nothing prevented the young 'ა.ჯ.ა.პ.ა from seeking revenge from his relative -- yes, even if his adoptive father -- for the blood of his *atalyk* that he had shed: so inviolable did he regard the mutual relations according to the line of *atalychestvo*, following what was laid down by his grandfathers. It is necessary to note that public opinion was favourably inclined towards actions of a similar nature.

Many elderly folk know of such legends as the following, based, in all probability, on real events. For example, they say:

When the ruler Hamud-bey (i.e. Mikhail) sent a suite to escort his bride, he sent to his future father-in-law, the Mingrelian Prince Dadiani, a large quantity of different gifts, including: 100 men led by the bride 100 horses, 50 of which were saddled; another 100 men drove before them 100 rams; a third 100 bulls. 'Who is the head among the guests?' Dadiani asked, when the arrival of the Abkhazians was reported to him.

'K'ats Maan, son of Xybr, they told him.

Prince Dadiani did not like it that the ruler of Abkhazia had sent to him at the head of the suite some old nobleman and decided not to give them his daughter. K'ats went to the bride herself, but she too refused to recognise him, not even rising from her seat. K'ats was enraged at such an affront, himself gave up on the bride and shortly left there with the entire suite and gifts. When they conveyed this news to Prince Dadiani, he said: 'Consider, he's enraged; maybe he'll even destroy my Hattic(?) fosterers, the Ladarias!'. K'ats, for his part, on his homeward journey, visited Kesaria, the mother of Gr. Chachba, and took as wife for his ruler another Dadiani girl who was being fostered in her house. After some time, heading a group of Sadz and Azax^W, he fell upon and ravaged in revenge for Prince Dadiani's slight the latter's fosterers from the Ladaria family.'

They tell that such an incident as the following did in fact take place:

Beslan Inal-Ipa and K'ats Maan together participated in some military actions or other (first half of the 19th century). One day K'ats Maan came late with his company to the place of battle, and it fell to Beslan's troop to enter into a one-sided battle with the opposition. They fought initially with bows and arrows but then proceeded to hand-to-hand skirmishing with sabres. Beslan was the ward of the Agrba family, and one of his milk-brothers, by name Dzhanyan Agrba (from the village of Antsx^Wa), never left the side of his 'ა.ჯ.ა.პ.ა in all of their undertakings. He was at his side on this occasion too. The valiant Agrba was the first to hurl himself on the enemy-bayonets, shielding Beslan with his body, and laid down his life earlier than his ward, as was required

according to custom. Later the wife of Beslan, the daughter of Levan Chachba, ordered two prisoners-of-war to be brought and led them around the graves of her husband and his milk-brother, who had been slain together and who had been buried in the village of Barmysh side by side; then she ordered the prisoners to be shot and buried right there at their feet.

As it was told in the village of Dzhg'arda, Prince Babysh Marshan of Ts'ebelda, at the head of an armed contingent, carried out a raid on his opponent, Prince Almaxsit Marshan of Dal. The latter, in his turn, took with him some devotees, including his milk-brother Bagvaz Amch'ba, visited the ailing Babysh and stabbed him on the spot. Constantly at the side of Babysh was his milk-brother, by name Six^Wash-Ipa, who, avenging his 'ax^Wəpʰa, right there killed Ardasher, Almaxsit's milk-brother.

Hero of the people, the peasant Hadzharat KJ'ax'ba, celebrated in songs, killed Prince Gyd Dzapsh-Ipa of Eshera on the basis of class-antagonism. This prince had been fostered by Chaxmat Vanacha (village of Lykhny). The younger brother of the latter, Jasyf Vanacha, married the blood-sister of Hadzharat. Chaxmat expelled his brother from the home on the grounds that he permitted himself to marry the sister of the murderer of their 'ax^Wəpʰa.

In the Song of the Dzhys there is an account of the feats of Danaq'ej Dzhyr-Ipa. While Danaq'ej was away, there was an attack on his settlement (Psh^Wy); robberies were committed, captives taken and cattle driven off. Learning of this, Danaq'ej pursued the plunderers, cut off their path in an inaccessible ravine and, in order to free his people, slew all the foe with well-aimed arrows, leaving only Q'aimat Agrba, who in a dishonourable fashion fatally wounded the hero. When Danaq'ej was brought home, he charged his younger brother, the valiant Omar, to seek out and kill the treacherous Q'aimat with his (Danaq'ej's) weapon and bring him in a cartridge within a period of three days the blood of his enemy paid in vengeance. 'Till this time I shall not allow myself to perish!' said Danaq'ej. 'May my food be nothing but mountain-mist until I fulfil the debt of vendetta!' were the words with which Omar set out from the house. He passed through many settlements and villages. At one place his attention was drawn to the wailing of a woman who was lamenting with these words: 'My ward Danaq'ej is cruelly undone!' Omar went up to that house and introduced himself to the old woman, evidently the foster-mother of Danaq'ej, who was pining away, and to her son Mancha. 'Q'aimat is terrible; do not approach him,' said Mancha to Omar. But Omar was duty-bound to kill his enemy, whose whereabouts they told him. Mancha, the milk-brother of Danaq'ej, went with Omar and, risking his life, helped him to overpower his dreadful foe.

One anonymous author published under the pseudonym 'Grig' in the paper 'Sukhum Reporter' in 1915 the Abkhazian legend on the origin of Gudauta (G^Wydawta). It was entitled 'Guda and Utu', and it related an interesting instance of reconciliation between deadly enemies by means of fostering. 'This legend,' writes the

unknown author, who was clearly familiar with the Abkhazians, 'is not the fruit of the author's fantasy but represents merely a literary reworking, without any distortion of the basic details, of the material which was available to the author; it represents his recording of the recollections of the late Prince Aleksandr Inal-Ipa about his forebears, which he heard in childhood from his nanny.' The story partly relates the following:

A terrifying prince Beslan lived on the Bzyp. He was inordinately proud and hot-tempered. One day the young Xabyg^W ran into him on the Barmysh road. Xabyg^W passed on the opposite side, not wishing to give Beslan the honour of even greeting him. Beslan commanded him to be seized and brought before him. In response to Beslan's peremptory cry as to why the young man was not observing the ancient customs, an offended Xabyg^W replied that he was not a slave and was minded to greet only those he wanted to greet. He didn't manage to finish speaking when the sabre in the hand of the incensed prince came crashing down and the audacious youth collapsed to the ground with his head split in two.

Servants carried Xabyg^W's body away to his parents in Barmysh. When they brought him there, his mother, crazed with grief, threw herself with screams onto the corpse of her firstborn. But the elderly father said nothing; he just removed his astrakhan hat and Caucasian boots before his son's body, looked at his blooded head, and screwed up his eyes, as he silently mouthed something. People tried to imagine what he might be whispering over his son's body: henceforth blood lay between him and Beslan, and it called for vengeance. They bewailed the deceased and buried him. Time passed. Old Xabyg^W went about like a black cloud before a storm. The people were waiting for the time when lightning would flash and the blow come crashing down. Beslan too felt uncomfortable, having won himself a mortal enemy; nowhere could he rest, even behind the walls of his high tower. And thereupon his wife died in presenting him with a daughter. A wet-nurse had to be found for her, and this was serious business, for, after all, a wet-nurse is not a mercenary maid -- Abkhazians do not sell a mother's milk for cash.

The prince learnt that a daughter was born also to Xabyg^W at this time. And Beslan suddenly had the idea to give his child for fostering to the wife of Xabyg^W and in this way to become permanently reconciled with him and cleanse himself of blood. With this aim Beslan with suite and rich gifts despatched his daughter to Barmysh. Before reaching the home of Xabyg^W, he sent forward envoys with gifts in order to urge him to forget the past and to accept the infant for fostering. But all persuasions proved useless, and the old man, not daring to humiliate the prince in front of all the people, simply said: 'I do not wish for a daughter of Beslan!' Returning, the envoys conveyed to Beslan Xabyg^W's refusal, which was for him a serious insult. Darkness spread over the prince's face, and he fell into contemplation, inclining his head. Then all of a sudden he straightened up, ordered his daughter to be given to him and went on foot with her to Xabyg^W's home. The suite followed behind him in silence. Beslan came to a halt at the gates, jumped down from his steed, unfastened from around his waist his scimitar, tied it to his neck with its belt and proceeded on foot into Xabyg^W's courtyard, carrying the infant in his hands. A sullen Xabyg^W emerged from his house. The prince halted before him and bowed his head low. 'Here's my head,

and here's my scimitar,' he said. 'Hack off the guilty head, but do not spurn my infant daughter!' Xabyg^W had no wish to listen to remonstrations. There ensued a heavy silence.

At this moment the wife of Xabyg^W, Zaxajda, came out of the house, took the child from the prince's hands and right there began to give it suck. 'Behold, prince,' she said, 'the lips of your daughter have touched my nipples. My blood gives pardon to you for the blood of my son. Enter our home and be our guest!'

Xabyg^W drew his hand over his eyes and for the first time looked straight at Beslan, then went up to him, took from the prince's neck his scimitar and fastened it to his waist.

'Enter our home and be our guest!' he said, repeating the words of his wife.

Thus ended the blood-enmity with the touching by young lips of the breast of a magnanimous woman³⁶.

³⁶Newspaper *Sukhum Reporter*, 1915, Nos. 63, 64, 70, 84 etc.

CHAPTER IV FOSTERAGE AND LEGEND

In Abkhazian religious belief and folklore (in stories, epic and legends) we often find leitmotifs dealing with *atalychestvo* and adoption.

The Abkhazians considered it quite possible to adopt even deities. In this connection the following curious fact is well-known. 'In the spring of 1914,' relates N. Dzhnashia, 'the whole of Abkhazia was subjected to a dreadful epidemic of smallpox; measures were taken and vaccinators despatched. One of the small hamlets belonging to the village of Dzhg'jarda did not let the vaccinators in, fearing that they would incur a penalty from the gods of smallpox, and preferred to guarantee themselves protection from the terrible disease through adopting the gods. The locals garnered their resources, bought a pair of fatted, snow-white goats, and set off for the woods. Here, in the bosom of nature, a banquet was laid for the invisible, divine guests. When everything was ready and the sacrifice laid according to custom on a high scaffold, the oldest village elder led the prayers and presented the sacrifice to the gods. Two beds, decorated with silken bed-covers, were spread right there. On the beds sat two young women, a noblewoman and a peasant, their unfastened breasts covered by silken handkerchiefs. The people, from great to small, were on their knees whilst the village-headman enunciated the words of the prayer in which he invited the great gods graciously to deign to accept their sacrifice, to set themselves upon the breasts of the best women of the village, and thereby, according to the tradition of their ancestors, to be adopted by the village. Here, beside the 'wet-nurses of the gods', stood the two best horses: one with a male saddle, the other with a female one. After the adoption-ceremony there followed a feast. And then the people, holding by the bridle the horses on which were invisibly seated the newly adopted patrons of smallpox, the god *ax'la.zosxan* (Golden Zosxan) and the goddess *xania* *g.k'w'ak'w'a* (White Xania), conducted their valued guests out of the village with singing, by which act they 'carried away' smallpox from themselves.

According to data in Abkhazian tales, attention is drawn to the unattractive shape of a very old woman with a tail and an exceptionally large jaw. This witch can become the protector of a hero in the event of the latter becoming her milk-son, and this can be achieved by his touching with his lips her breasts, which are hideously thrown over her back. The 'Tale of the Three Hairs'³⁷ deserves attention from this point of view.

In one of the Nart legends concerning the adventures of Xabzhyn, son of Xnaw, the story contains the following passing reference to adoption:

One of the sisters of Xabzhyn was carried off by a white cloud, and another by a black one.

Xabzhyn went after them. On the difficult journey his horse had a fall. At length, he came to a

³⁷ K.S. Shaq'ryl & X.S. Bghazh^wba *Abkhazian Tales*, vol.1. Sukhum, 1940, p. 258.

certain settlement. Entering one of the houses, he noticed an old lady sitting there whose hideously large breasts were thrown over her shoulders. Unnoticed, he crept up to her and, wishing to be adopted, touched with his lips this woman's breast. The old woman turned out to be the mother of the giants who, in the guise of clouds, had abducted Xabzhyn's sisters. From one of them he received as gift a sabre, from the other the finest steed, by the name of Wash^Wamat.

One of the Narts had the renowned son Waxsit' (xəwət'). Waxsit' one day mounted up and came out with a herd of horses. Reaching the River Kuban [q^W'əbajna], he drove his horses straight onto the estate of a giant. The herd went off to graze, whilst Waxsit' lay down under a tree and fell asleep. Noticing him, the dread giant, unused to seeing strangers in his patch, stepped forth to have a fight with him, saying: 'How did you, you wretched Abkhazian, manage to come here with your herd?' After a three-day continuously violent struggle, Waxsit' finally overcame the giant, whom no-one had previously defeated. Then, paying homage to the hero and wishing to be reconciled with him, the giant adopted Waxsit', for which he bared his breast so that the Nart could lay his lips on it. And Waxsit' thence began to live in a golden chamber at the place of his adoptive father³⁸.

In Abkhazian folklore one also comes across references to humans finding themselves in kinship-relations with certain representatives of the animal kingdom, whilst with others the ties linking them are of contractual kinship, fosterage and adoption. For example, several tales from the Nart epic recount the giving of children to wolves and other creatures for fostering. Thus, Nart Sasryq^W'a married the sister of the Ts'ans (the fabled tribe of dwarfs). The mother fostered out one son born to them to a wolf, the other son to a badger. This angered Sasryq^W'a, and he drove out his wife. However, the Ts'ans had no intention of allowing their sister to be treated in this way. So, one of them addressed himself to Sasryq^W'a: 'Your sons, both the one taken by the wolf and the one taken by the badger are alive and well.' Then he revealed his demands in return for the slight to their sister.

In the tale Xjymk^W'rasa it is told how an old man had a son, Xjymk^W'rasa, by an old woman towards the end of their lives. Shortly after this, they both died, not living long enough to rear the child. Xjymk^W'rasa was left quite alone, naked, and without subsistence. One day, when he was sitting in tears in his decrepit hovel, a little vixen suddenly rushed in to him and said: 'Don't be alarmed; I have come to rear you. Your mother -- may heaven be her kingdom! -- brought me up, for I too was early deprived of my parents. Your mother always had chickens for me, and she raised me on chicken-meat, feeding me everyday on little chickens. I was allowed to take a chicken even when she didn't see this. And look how I turned out! Now it's my turn to raise you!³⁹. And the little vixen duly reared Xjymk^W'rasa, guarded him from all

³⁸Sh.D. Inal-Ipa 'On the Abkhazian Nart tales', in *Works of the Abkhazian Scholarly Research Institute*, XXIII. Sukhum, 1949, p. 103.

³⁹K.S. Shaq'ryl & X.S. Bghazh^Wba *Abkhazian Tales*, vol. 1. Sukhum, 1940, pp. 276-281.

misfortunes, destroyed the giants, gave all their wealth to him, and also married him to a beautiful queen. So ended the tale.

In the story *How a shepherd married the princess Xjymk^w'rasa* it is related how a prince wanted to give his daughter, Xjymk^w'rasa, to the best marksman. And it was the shepherd G^wejlyxxa who in the competition gained victory over the multitude of noblemen and princes who pretended to the maiden's hand. The haughty prince nevertheless had no wish to have as son-in-law a simple shepherd and decided to set him a further, deliberately unfulfillable task. The prince beckoned to the shepherd and said: 'Might you be able, G^wejlyxxa, to fetch me right now a cup of fresh milk from a fallow-deer (a.'jəbəstə)?' G^wejlyxxa set off promptly (his name means 'quick-witted, efficient') and quickly delivered the cup of deer-milk. 'What do you call this mud-coloured milk?' asked the astonished prince. G^wejlyxxa replied: 'This is deer-milk. I went to the mountains, trapped a deer, took milk from her and brought it here. It is mud-coloured, because, when I began to milk the hind, she started to become anxious, to hurt herself, to fling herself about and be frisky, saying: "No-one had ever dared to lay hands on me! Who is it that I have made my foster-child?!"'⁴⁰.

In the story 'How they abducted the children of Bag^wdazh^w' some crafty women, wishing to drown the weird children of their sister, flung them into a river; but the river cast the twins upon the bank. A nanny-goat came there to graze and suckled the wretched infants with her milk⁴¹.

In the opinion of some, bears also have milk-kinship with humans. It is precisely for this reason that they seemingly fear humans and avoid them -- coming upon a human, they try to get away from him unnoticed. If, coming across a bear, a human thrice enunciates: 'Mother, mother, mother!', then, according to superstition, the bear may not touch him.

In certain details of life and in folklore attention is drawn to the exceptionally close ties between man and deer. Among the Abkhazians the deer has the status of the most beautiful creature of all living things and is regarded as possessing the loveliest shape to the highest degree. Speaking of a maiden's beauty they say: 'Her neck is like that of a deer when showing timidity', and they compare a fine child with the fawns of deer.

In the verse-legend about the illustrious hunter and folk-hero KJ'ag^wa Inapha it is stated that he built a fence out of the rib- and shin-bones of deer. In this connection, it seems scarcely coincidental that a deer-motif is the most characteristic emblem in Abkhazian folk-ornamentation⁴². The deer is, if not the only, then the most beloved

⁴⁰ wa.'qə səjm.g^wa'w'jətəzət' x^wəpħə'sə jəq'a.s'ts'a.da, *ibid.*, pp. 272-75.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 324-5.

⁴² V.V. Stasov: 'The decorations of generally all peoples come from the remote past, and amongst peoples of the ancient world ornamentation never continued a single emotional line: each dash there had its own significance, being the word, phrase, expression of well-known meanings and ideas. The lines of ornamentation are [like] connected speech, a flowing melody, possessing its own cause and not

object of representation for Abkhazian artisans. For example, quite often one finds in Abkhazian villages mural decorations displaying depicting live deer in different aspects.

In a legend written down by me in the settlement of Duripsh it is told how suddenly the mountains opened up in a yawning hole in front of a hunter; he fell into a fantastic world where people lived together with game and the wife of the god of hunting herself was there milking the deer.

In another story there is an account of a hunter seeing in the mountains a deer with her fawns and amongst them a handsome boy, all naked:

The deer had found him as a babe in the forest. It transpires that the mother of the infant had become a prisoner and had given birth on the road. The abandoned baby was picked up and reared by the deer. The hunter lifted up the little savage, took him home and adopted him. In the society of humans the infant now learnt to speak, something which he did not know before. The adoptive father named him Dzhamx^{Wyx^W}, Son of the Hind. He turned into a noteworthy fellow without whose participation no issue of note was decided. This hunter had a son of his own, who was of a foolish disposition. For this reason, when the father was dying, he left all his property to Dzhamx^{Wyx^W}, handing to him also all the keys. 'If my son is very insistent,' he said prior to his death, 'you can show him all the rooms but one.' The son of the hunter became insistent that he be shown all the wealth left behind by his father. Dzhamx^{Wyx^W} was obliged to take him even into the forbidden room. Standing there was a portrait of a beautiful maid. One glance at the portrait was enough for the hunter's son to lose his senses and swoon to the floor. Coming round, he declared that he would do away with himself, if Dzhamx^{Wyx^W} didn't fetch and marry him to the beauty portrayed in the picture. Dzhamx^{Wyx^W} set out in search of the beauty. One after another he met along the road seven individuals. They all had mastery of some unusual qualities, each according to his own. In answer to the questions posed by an amazed Dzhamx^{Wyx^W} they, as if by design, gave the same reply: 'What I do surprises you, but what would be your reaction, if you saw Dzhamx^{Wyx^W}, Son of the Hind?!' Having found out who he was, they joined him as each meeting took place. Finally, the girl they were seeking was found and turned out to be the sister of seven athletes. Not wishing to give her away, the latter set before the newcomers a whole series of conditions. All the obstacles were overcome except one. This consisted of having to climb to the very top of an exceptionally high column with a flat saucer of boiling water placed on the head and to descend from there without spilling a single drop of water. Dzhamx^{Wyx^W} readily reached the indicated summit, but, taking a look around, he noticed in the distance how wolves were tearing to pieces the deer that had raised him. Unable to bear it, the hero Dzhamx^{Wyx^W} burst into tears, and hot tears poured from his eyes. When he descended, the athletes didn't believe him when he claimed that it was not the water but his tears that had been spilled. Dzhamx^{Wyx^W} had to repeat all over again his difficult ascent. Having triumphed in this way over all difficulties, Dzhamx^{Wyx^W} along

designated only for the eyes but also for the mind and other senses' (*Soviet Encyclopaedia*, 1947, No. 4, p. 159).

with his companions took the girl, brought her home and married her to the imbecile son of the hunter.

According to legend, the wives of three brothers, ancestors of the Inal-Ipa family -- which was originally known, according to old tales, by the name Arstaa -- one day were occupied with the harvesting of millet. The middle one was pregnant. At noon the women sat down to rest in the shade of a tree and without noticing it fell asleep. The oldest woke up and observed that a little snake had crawled into the mouth of her sleeping pregnant sister. The poor thing sprang to her feet, but, in order not to alarm her, the oldest one said nothing to her. They returned home, and, when the pregnant one wanted a drink, the eldest gave her water mixed with milk and for food decided on milk-porridge exclusively. Thus passed a month and a half before the confinement took place. The women-neighbours came but were not allowed in to the one in labour. A boy was born, a large black snake with a white blemish on its chest entwined in a coil around his neck. The oldest of the women, showing nothing to anyone, took the child. Addressing the snake, she said: 'Welcome to our little guest, our saviour, our foster-mother, you have protected us from danger!' Furthermore, she carefully spun the infant several times around, and the snake in this fashion freed the boy's neck and fell to the ground. Only thereafter did she present the babe to his mother and then set the snake on its way, helping it very gently to go into the yard and repeating the same words: 'Our little guest, our saviour, our foster-mother.' Carriers of the surname Inal-Ipa do not kill snakes, for they consider that they come from a sacred force (nəxə.p.'tə'wə.xə.w.p'). With these words the informant finished⁴³.

In another legend related by the same informant it is told how a human hides in the shape of a snake. One day a certain person met a snake and wounded it in the back with an arrow. Its friends found the wounded creature and conveyed it to the den. It was the sole heir of its parents. Soon two human-like beings met that man. They won his confidence and took him along the road as their companion. Through a narrow passage all three of them came to a certain lodging. There a husband and wife were bitterly weeping, sitting around a wounded snake. They charged the one who had inflicted the wound to fetch from wherever necessary the one and only medicinal cure in the world -- a thimbleful of breast-milk from a woman who did not know any man but her husband. 'But how to recognise such a woman?' he asked. 'We'll give you a mirror which has the power to ascertain everything,' they answered him. For a long time he searched the world, but nowhere did he find a woman without sin. At length he noticed one who made the following confession to him: 'Getting married, I found myself pregnant. Before this became obvious, I decided to visit my parents. There was a boy there, who, sitting on my lap, urinated on my dress. I have no other sin to confess.' He

⁴³Recorded by the author of these lines from the mouth of Gr. Ajba in the settlement of Otxara, 1947.

took milk from her and returned to the patient. They washed the wound with this milk, and immediately it recovered. Then they let him go home, and he came to Bzyp Abkhazia, where he became ruler.

CHAPTER V

COMPARATIVE ASPECTS OF CAUCASIAN FOSTERAGE

Much interesting material can be drawn from historical ethnography in regard to *atalychestvo*, the institution of which was well-known to many peoples, including the peoples of the civilisation of Asia Minor. We have a lot of relevant material, for example, in regard to ancient Georgia. In the words of Academician Ivane A. Dzhavakhishvili, it is clear from the *Life of Shushanik* that in Georgia already at that time (5th century AD) the giving out of children for fostering was practised⁴⁴.

According to the description of Georgian history by Dzhuansher, there existed in ancient Georgia a tradition according to which the children of the sovereign were brought up in the homes of renowned people of the state. Thus, for instance, the two children of King Mirdat' were raised by others. About this we read in *Kartlis Tskhovreba* [History of Georgia]:

Mirdat' succeeded as king and ruled like his father by continuing the [Christian] faith of his father. Queen Sagduxt' became pregnant and gave birth to a daughter, whom they named Xuarandze. Once again King Mirdat' and Queen Sagduxt' besought God to give them a son. After four years Sagduxt' fell pregnant and gave birth to a son, and they named him in Persian Varan-Xuasro-tang, in Georgian Vaxt'ang. The hearts of the parents were filled with joy at the birth of Vaxt'ang. They despatched messengers to deliver the joyous tidings to all the *eristavs* [heads of the people]. They prepared every kind of precious goods, gold and silver, and presented them to the poor, and gave thanks to god, praying without sleep till dawn in the church.

After this the king summoned all the prominent people to the city. And over the course of many days he put on a banquet and entertainment. They all besought God that Vaxt'ang should thrive. The Sp'asp'et' [Commander-in-Chief] Saurmag asked him with much entreaty to be allowed to foster the child. The king gave his son Vaxt'ang to Sp'asp'et' Saurmag for fostering, because there was a tradition according to which the children of the sovereigns were fostered in the homes of the eminent. Then, in the sixth year, Sagduxt' gave birth to a second daughter, and they named her Miranduxt'. The Sp'asalar [Military Head] of the town of K'asp'i, asked for her [for fostering -- Sh.D.I.], and the king gave her to him. And the Sp'asalar took the child to the town of K'asp'i, and she was raised there. The second year after this the king died.

In the self-same *Kartlis Tskhovreba* it is said that several families of *deda.m.dzudz.e* (i.e. wet-nurses) were brought to Mtskheta⁴⁵. And then over the course of many centuries, right up to the end of the 19th century, *atalychestvo* in Georgia retained its importance, as attested in the description by Arcangelo Lamberti, an [Italian missionary] author of the 17th century.

⁴⁴Ivane A. Dzhavakhishvili. *History of the Georgian People, I*, chapter V [the text says VII], 'Georgian Culture 1st-7th centuries of our era', [in Georgian], 1960, Tbilisi University Press.

⁴⁵*Kartlis Tskhovreba* p. 92 [of the 1942 edition -- in Georgian].

It is enough merely to recall the biography of the Georgian writer Ak'ak'i Ts'ereteli, who was himself given out for fostering by *atalychestvo* in 1840. His wonderful description of his childhood is well-known, including the tradition of giving out children for fostering, in which he sometimes fell into an excessive idealisation of the institution of *atalychestvo*. He writes:

The tradition of giving out children for fostering to a family of peasant wet-nurses has been practised in Georgia for a long time: royal children and the children of ruling princes were given out to, and fostered by, families of the *eristavs*⁴⁶, whilst *eristavs* and princes used to give out their children to noblemen, and noblemen gave them to peasants. However, even princely children were more often than not brought up in peasant-families. It is not necessary to suppose that the parents were in those times heartless or loved their children less than they love them today. There were entirely different reasons and grounds for it: the ties which developed between a foster-child and the family of his wet-nurse united and reconciled different classes. If we exclude closeness between godchildren, godparents and their families that derived from the rite of baptism, even blood-kinship did not always unite people as tightly as they were united by these 'milk'-bonds. Not only milk-brothers and sisters but also close kin and even distant relatives and affines of the wet-nurse were ready in case of necessity to lay down their lives for their foster-child; the latter, in his turn, was their reliable defender. That is why among us in relationships between the highest and the lowest classes there were preserved right up to the last [19th] century a widely known lack of affection and tenderness. Needless to say, I too was given out for fostering to a village in consonance with this wise tradition -- God bless it! And I too must confess: if anything generous and good has been retained in me, then it is mainly thanks to the fact that I was brought up in the village, together with peasant-children...⁴⁷.

Georgian feudal lords well recognized how to derive great advantage from the practice of this ancient custom. Coming out against change to feudal rights, they, for instance, used to say: 'How can we allow any change to feudal rights to occur, for then we'll surely lose wet-nurses?!'⁴⁸. Abkhazian land-owners also expressed this same opinion.

Both for the purpose of preventing enmity and for establishing kinship-ties and friendly relations in olden times there was practised, if not everywhere, then certainly in western Georgia, preeminently among the Mingrelians, the rite of adoption -- which, it is true, cannot be wholly equated with *atalychestvo*. The description of this rite amongst the Mingrelians is encountered already in certain authors of the 17th century. Its existence in recent times is underlined by Tedo Saxok'ia: 'A young person comes up to his future "mother" and "lays his lips" on her exposed breast, simulating a suckling child and uttering this very laconic oath-formula: "You are the mother, I am the son". In

⁴⁶ *eristav* (literally 'head of the people) was a ruling prince and sometimes military chief.

⁴⁷ Ak'ak'i Ts'ereteli. *loc. cit.* (cf. Footnote 28), p. 20.

⁴⁸ P'. Gugushvili *Georgian Journalism* [in Georgian], 1941. Appendix: 'The view of 74 nobles...'

Mingrelian this tradition is called *dzudzu.sha k'ibir.ish ge.dg.um.a* 'the laying of lips on the breast'⁴⁹. Apart from this specific form of adoption, in the same article by Tedo Saxok'ia there is a description of a variant of real *atalychestvo*, which had several peculiar features amongst the Mingrelians.

It is essential to note that Abkhazian *atalychestvo* and its Mingrelian variant have several parallels and points in common (for example, the rite of adoption mentioned above). This circumstance permits us to compare these variants according to their distinctive elements. Only such a point-by-point comparative historical study of all variants of *atalychestvo* can be the most successful from the point of view of scholarship. But most interesting are the relevant lexical correspondences. Thus, for the Abkhazian terms 'აბ.ა.დძძაჲ' 'foster-father' and 'ან.ა.დძძეჲ' 'foster-mother' there exist the Old Georgian parallels *mama.m.dzudz.e* and *deda.m.dzudz.e*⁵⁰. They also have their analogues in the Mingrelian language: *mo.rd.u* 'rearer' and *dzidze* 'wet-nurse'. In the Abkhaz word 'ა.დძძაჲ' we have a correspondence between Abkhaz აჲ and [Old] Georgian *j* (*dzidza.j*)⁵¹. The word 'ა.გან'დალ, which is met in the practice of Abkhazian *atalychestvo*, is of Georgian origin: *gan.deg.il.i* 'rearer'^{51a}. Abkhaz 'ა.ბჳა.ტაჳა.ჲა' 'milk-brother of a foster-child' has a parallel in Georgian *dzudzu.(s.)m.t'e* 'sharer of the milk'⁵². The same has to be said also in respect of the term of endearment with which the Abkhazians named their fosterchild, namely 'ა.ჳაჳ'ჲა (in the Bzyp dialect 'ა.ჳაჳ'ჲა). This term, clearly, derives from the Georgian expression *upl.is shv.il.i* (i.e. 'lord's child, tsarevitch').

The custom of *atalychestvo*, as is well-known, was widely disseminated among other Caucasian peoples, especially amongst the Circassians, amongst whom it corresponds in all main features with that of the Abkhazians. This is clear, for example, from the following words of the famous Kabardian scholar Shora B. Nogmov in regard to the Kabardians:

The children of princes or rulers were given out immediately upon birth to a 'ჳარჳ' or 'nobleman', who often tried a month in advance to gain this honour. Up to the seventh year the fosterer of the little prince would cradle the ward ('ჳან), singing to him: 'Le-lay, le-lay, my light, you'll grow up to be great, you'll be strong; win yourself steeds and all sorts of booty, but never forget me, in my

⁴⁹Tedo Saxok'ia 'On Mingrelia', newspaper *Petersburg News*, 1916, No. 176.

⁵⁰*Kartlis Tskhovreba*, p. 93.

⁵¹P'et're Ch'araia 'On the relationship between the Abkhaz language and Japhetic', St. Petersburg, 1912, Section 8A. [In fact, it is not a comparison between endings that should be made in these words, for the Old Georgian semi-vowel here is the quite distinct morpheme that marks the Nominative case-ending; one should rather look to Mingrelian *dzidze* as holistic source for Abkhaz 'ა.დძძაჲ' 'fosterer' -- Translator's note]

^{51a}[In fact, this Georgian word does not mean 'rearer' but 'hermit', and so the Georgian word that should have been cited here is *ga.m.zrd.el.i* 'rearer', the direct counterpart of Mingrelian *mo.rd.u* and, indeed, the title of the poem by Ak'ak'i Ts'ereteli cited earlier -- Translator's note]

⁵²Sulkhan Saba Orbeliani *sit'q'vis k'ona* 'Bundle of Words = Dictionary', p. 358 of volume IV₂ of the 1966 edition of the author's collected works [in Georgian].

old age!' At the age of 16 the fosterer used to dress the young prince as well as he could, provide him with a fine steed, fitted him out with a valuable weapon and conducted him to his paternal home whither the son was forbidden to journey till then; this journey home was accompanied by many ceremonies. The father of the young prince used to present the fosterer with horses, herds and even serfs and would then send him home with honour. The ward was obliged to spare nothing to his *atalyk* and to fulfil all his wishes. Girls from the princely family were fostered also in alien homes and could return to their own folk only for a visit. Their dowry used to be given to the *atalyks*⁵³.

James Stanislaus Bell writes the following about *atalychestvo* among the Circassians:

The *atalyk* not only feeds, dresses and rears the child entrusted to him without payment but also provides him with a steed and weapon -- in a word, the *atalyk*, as it would appear, in all relationships takes the place for him of the father, enjoying greater respect than his real father. The *atalyk*, expecting to receive a reward after the upbringing of the youth ended, relies on the exploits and military booty of his adopted son as well as on the gratitude of both his ward and the ward's family. The rearing under the guidance of the *atalyk* lasts from 6 to 8 years. Much depends on the ability of the father to select his son's *atalyk*. I have never heard of any exploitation or stupid behaviour on the part of the *atalyk*. But one nobleman from Abuguma addressed me with an appeal to help him regain the standing that he had lost. This misfortune, according to his own words, had happened to him because of the poverty of his *atalyk*, with the result that the ward was deprived of decent clothing. It happens that girls too are given out in the same fashion for fostering, but this does not represent the usual state of affairs⁵⁴.

The very process of fostering among the Circassians is also in many details characterised by features which are equivalent to those of the Abkhazians:

Boys were fostered by women up to the age of seven; after that, they transferred to the hands of men who accustomed them to mastering the knife and hitting the target with it. When they were a bit older, then in place of a knife they used to be given a dagger for practice. After that there followed bow and arrows; in this way they taught them step-by-step, as they developed into manhood and gained strength, to master all types of weapons and ride a horse. Girls from the age of seven they used to bind around the waist with morocco-bands in order to keep them more svelte. They were taught embroidery with gold and silk, how to make braid and laces and how to sew dresses. When the girl got married, the newlywed husband used to cut the ribbon with which the corset was sewn with all possible care so as not to cut into either the body or the morocco-bands. If he damaged the one or the other, this was held against him as a great dishonour. The young

⁵³Shora B. Nogmov *History of the Adyghe People*, Nal'chik, 1958, pp. 33-4.

⁵⁴James Stanislaus Bell *Journal of a residence in Circassia* [in 2 vols., 1840], vid. the manuscript-translation [from English into Russian] by N.A. Dankevich-Pushchina, pp. 345-47. Archive of the Abkhazian Institute.

CHAPTER VI

HISTORICAL ORIGINS OF THE *ATALYK* INSTITUTION

There exist several explanations of the essence and origin of the *atalyk* institution in the Caucasus attempted by Prof. M.O. Kosven in his work *Atalychestvo*.

Certain people have suggested that Caucasian *atalychestvo* is a Turkish or Mongol institutional borrowing. Even allowing that we may be dealing with a borrowed institution, this does not help us to take one step closer to explaining its essence; nor does it reveal the causes of its origin amongst those from whom it was borrowed. Regarding Caucasian *atalychestvo*, the viewpoint that it has been borrowed is hardly supported by any facts, if we do not take into account the use by different authors of the actual term *atalyk*, taken, quite clearly, from Turkish as a general designation for the said phenomenon. Subsequently, this term became traditional, widely used in specialist literature.

Atalychestvo existed previously in the Caucasus predominantly among the Adyghe-Abkhazian-Kartvelian groups (Circassians, Abkhazians, Svans, Mingrelians, Imeretians, etc.). It also found extension among the Caucasian peoples of Turkic extraction (Balkars, Karachays), of Iranian extraction (Ossetians), and to a lesser extent among the Ingush, Chechens and Kumyks⁵⁸. In consequence, the institution under investigation can be localised in the main on the territory of the western Caucasus, and the further east we move in the Caucasus, the less characteristic it becomes.

Particularly in the Adyghe-Abkhazian group, *atalychestvo* is an organic element of ethnographic life: a phenomenon with very deep roots which take us back to an epoch far distant from us; an institution which is widespread and was clearly reflected in the social and spiritual life of the community, including the ancient examples of oral folk-art and other artefacts of folklore, as one might have been easily convinced on the basis of the Abkhazian materials laid out above. This gives one grounds to suggest that the institution of Caucasian *atalychestvo* -- which is a creation of local (i.e. indigenous ancient Caucasian) socio-economic conditions -- developed in the first instance in the Adyghe-Abkhazian ethnic milieu, from which it was later transferred to the other, neighbouring peoples. Nothing changes, even if the term *atalyk* is of Turkish origin⁵⁹: as has been stated, it is predominantly a literate term, and one which is new in comparison with the custom signified by it, universally found in Caucasian literature; for it is completely unknown by at least several of the major peoples who practise the said phenomenon, for example in Abkhazia, where the notion is expressed, as we have

⁵⁸M.O. Kosven 'Atalychestvo' -- *Soviet Ethnography*, 2, 1935, p. 41; cf. also Anatolij N. Genko 'The problem of the ethnographical study of the Caucasus', *Soviet Ethnography*, 4-5, 1936, p. 15.

⁵⁹Cp. Anatolij N. Genko *loc. cit.* pp. 15-16: 'Following the spread of the term *atalyk*, for example in Bukhara... and of the equivalent term *atabeg*, the corresponding term in the Circassian milieu developed first of all under the influence of feudal Crimea'.

seen, with the aid of local terminology: 'aada.ra 'rearing', a.'k'ək'a.xə 'breast-milk', or simply a.'xəə, also in the sense of 'milk'.

The *atalyk*-institution has also been explained (e.g. by Leontovich) also as a necessity in conditions of mountain-life for giving children a strict upbringing. This is not a serious explanation: such traditions and social regimes came into being and were practised not because of the intentional wish or desire of this or that group of people, but independently of the consciousness of the people, by force of the historical (socio-economic) conditions experienced by the given community. In addition, the very process of being raised by an *atalyk* -- who, by the way, could be anybody, and not necessarily a specialist in upbringing -- is not characterised by any peculiarly distinctive features. Children received in essence just the same upbringing whether it be with an *atalyk* or with their own parents. And why could strict habits, even if one assumes them to be the main goal of *atalychestvo*, not be imbued in the growing generation in their own environment in the home of the feudal lords themselves? What is the basis for assuming peasant-families to be a better arena for that purpose, when they lived, on the contrary, more according to patriarchal, democratic principles? Finally, not to speak of other reasons, the Abkhazian material bears particular witness to the fact that *atalychestvo* is a rite that existed not only and not so much by reason of a wish to 'give out' children for rearing as much as by reason of a yearning to *receive* a child, a yearning which among the Abkhazians sometimes went as far as the abduction of one.

Others (e.g. Kokiev) have explained the origin of *atalychestvo* by a yearning to acquire friends and defenders by virtue of which 'it developed on the basis of the mutual economic interests between the *atalyk* and the family of the ward'. For peasants in the feudal era this was a real means of acquiring a powerful 'defender'; princes, on the other hand, acquired devoted people who brought them huge material advantages. Such was the real significance of Abkhazian *atalychestvo* long before it came to an end. In this way, this institution was, as it were, a concomitant of the feudal system, for which vassal-relations were characteristic. But it is impossible to rest on such a recent understanding of the rite. This explanation connects the phenomenon under investigation -- which, in all probability, is very ancient -- with a phenomenon (feudalism) which is of a comparatively late origin. It is difficult to suppose that the causes of the origin of *atalychestvo* were rooted in feudalism, that it was a necessary derivation of the feudal social system; for in that case why do we not encounter *atalychestvo* in several other prototypical feudal states and, conversely, why do we encounter it amongst peoples who have no notion of feudalism at all? It remains to seek the bases for such causes in a distant, *pre-feudal* past.

The explanation offered by M.M. Kovalevskij [Kovalevsky] is closer to the truth, insofar as he seeks the causes for the development of *atalychestvo* in the conditions of primitive-social structure. In *Law and Custom in the Caucasus*, linking this rite to

'communal marriage' and uncertainty as to the father's identity, he writes: 'Children amongst the Circassians are put out for fostering with a foreign person who wishes to play for the child the role of *atalyk*, for the reason that their belonging to this or that father was a matter of dispute, obviously for no other reason than that all members of one fraternity might equally be the husbands of the children's mother. Only their open recognition by this or another male made them *his* children. For this a birth in one or another family was not sufficient -- adoption was also required, an adoption that took on the above-described form of the handing over by the *atalyk* of the grown up son into the hands of the husband of the boy's mother'⁶⁰. But, it would seem, the return of the ward was not accompanied by any reciprocal adoption on the part of the parents.

In a work of Venera V. Bardavelidze dedicated to the study of rituals connected with the veneration of smallpox among the peoples of the Caucasus note is taken of the practice of establishing milk-kinship with the gods of smallpox by means of *atalychestvo* and symbolic adoption. Further study of different materials showed the author the wide spread of the idea of milk-kinship in the religious beliefs of the Caucasian peoples as applied not only to different deities but also to the world of fauna (wolves, deers) with the goal of securing defence from the said deities or creatures and of acquiring in the guise of them protectors and patrimonial patrons. Vestiges of the religious practice of union with the world of fauna by means of *atalychestvo* and adoption gave the author the grounds for devising the interesting and alluring but as yet scientifically unproven opinion (by way of a working hypothesis) about the possible genetic link of the institution of milk-kinship with totemism⁶¹.

According to the hypothesis of M.O. Kosven, *atalychestvo* represents one of the remnant-forms of 'avunculate', i.e. the ancient rite of the passage of children to the mother's family. In other words, its origin is linked to the conditions of a period of transition from matriarchy to patriarchy. At this transitional period the child, as is well-known, belonged to the family of the mother, and, if the settlement into which she married practised patriarchy, the child was fostered by his maternal uncle. It is precisely to this transitional period that one can ascribe also the practice of the giving out of children for fostering to relatives on the mother's side and compensating for the upbringing of the child. It would seem that we here find ourselves face to face with a crucial moment in the history of the construction of kinship: a state of affairs according to which, regardless of the transfer of a woman to the husband's group, her children still did not belong to the father's family and, probably, remained linked to the family of the mother. However, with the strengthening of the patriarchal family-structure, the

⁶⁰M. Kovalevskij *Primitive Right*, part 1, p. 158 [?part of *Zakon i obyčaj na kavkaze* 'Law and Custom in the Caucasus', Moscow, 1890].

⁶¹A.I. Robakidze 'The ethnographical work of the Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences of the Georgian SSR', *Soviet Ethnography*, No. 3, 1946, p. 165.

movement of the children out of the paternal family was gradually substituted by a temporary transfer to the maternal family, with an eventual return to the father; in the Caucasus this ultimately evolved into *atalychestvo*. Consequently, with the development of patriarchy the transfer of children from the father's family to an outsider came to be at odds with the new relationships of production, and their adhesion to the family of the father came to be required by means of their redemption from the family of the mother⁶². 'In the Caucasus,' writes M.O. Kosven, 'children used to be given out not to their maternal family. This was actually necessary precisely so that the children not remain in another family group but would ultimately return to their own paternal family, i.e. so that they could be received back on the basis not of family-ties but rather ties of dependency'⁶³.

However, as has already been observed in the literature⁶⁴, the article by M.O. Kosven '*Atalychestvo*', whilst illustrating the fruitfulness of a sociological approach to ethnographical material, must yet be recognised to suffer in the final analysis from one major defect: a patent insufficiency of factual material from the ethnography of the relevant Caucasian peoples. The author mainly operates with evidence provided by chance-observers, i.e. with materials of secondary importance; he does not enlist the services of basic, local sources of information; nor does he turn to the richest folkloristic material. Even more unsatisfactory, if not even entirely missing, is his use of linguistic material. And the author, I regret to say, is especially weak in familiarity with Abkhazian ethnography, which occupies in his work at most a few lines (and then only following Al'bov and Dzhanashvili).

The author acknowledges his own limitations as regards to materials and tries to compensate for this serious defect by referring to rather distant parallels (even on a global scale!). But analogy is not evidence. Moreover, the comparability of many of these analogies and parallels with Caucasian *atalychestvo* remains in many instances doubtful. All this forces one to reach the conclusion that M.O. Kosven's theoretically astute general opinion survives only as a possible, rather vague schema. It has not received substantiation, and in consequence the problem of the genesis of the institution under investigation has not found the desired interpretative solution.

Noting that the transition from the maternal family to that of the father is accompanied by a particular complex of mutual relations between the families, F. Engels remarked:

In proportion as wealth increased, this, on the one hand, gave to the husband a more influential status in the family than to the wife; it stimulated, on the other hand, a yearning to utilise this

⁶²Cf. K.V. Vjatkina 'Vestiges of the maternal family among the Buryats and Mongols', *Soviet Ethnography*, No. 1, 1946.

⁶³M.O. Kosven '*Atalychestvo*', in *Soviet Ethnography*, No. 2, 1935, p. 52.

⁶⁴Anatolij N. Genko 'The problem of the ethnographical study of the Caucasus', *Soviet Ethnography*, Nos. 4-5, 1936, p. 14.

consolidated status for the purpose of altering the traditional practice of inheritance to the advantage of his own children. But this could not succeed as long as descent was established according to the right of the mother. This latter had to be changed, and it was changed...The simple decision was sufficient that in the future the issue of the male members of the family had to remain in it, just as the issue of the women had to be excluded from it and transfer to the family of their father. By this was altered the determination of descent according to the female line, as well as inheritance according to the right of the mother; and there appeared both the definition of descent according to the male line and the right of inheritance by the father. We know nothing of how and when this revolution took place among civilized people⁶⁵.

The institution of *atalychestvo* was essential for the societies that created it at a well-known stage of their historical development. Its emergence was dictated by a vital economic requirement; it was a concrete expression of the general economic law of necessary correspondences of productive relations with the character of the productive forces. As is well-known, this law, revealed by Karl Marx, has deep significance for understanding the history of all human society. It places in the hands of historians a powerful weapon, especially valuable in the analysis of historical phenomena of transitional epochs, shifting from one socio-economic formation to another, when this law is manifested most clearly.

At a cost of maternal rights, to which people were subject under matriarchy, the economic and social role of the male increased. He began to create and provide all the more material blessings, including produce of animal-husbandry (a branch of the economy in which men always played a special role) and military booty. With the appearance of the rudiments of private property and barter they begin to value wealth all the more. In connection with this, there arose the necessity of regulating inheritance of both property and the title of familial possession. In other words, it was essential to resolve the contradiction between productive relations and the character of the new and developing productive forces; to do away with inheritance on the basis of maternal right, and to establish such a state of affairs as would facilitate it according to the male right: the right for the husband to pass on to the children his name and to keep the accumulated wealth within his own kin-group, which was composed of agnatic relatives. In the Caucasus, the practical implications of this transformation, which was revolutionary in antiquity, took the form of transferring children to a foreign family (transitional step) in place of the mother's for guaranteeing their subsequent full return to the kin-group of the father: i.e. the form of *atalychestvo*, which in origin thus represents an ideological reflection of radical economic changes in the life of local society.

⁶⁵F. Engel's *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, Moscow, 1948, p. 65.

CHAPTER VII CONCLUSIONS

Without doubt, Abkhazian ethnography sheds light on the question of how and when this [?prehistoric] revolution occurred, i.e. the transition of the maternal family to that of the father, to which period, in all likelihood, is related the origin of the institution of *atalychestvo*. But what does Abkhazian ethnography on *atalychestvo* specifically have to say about the origin of the latter? I shall sum up some of the most essential (from the point of view of the genesis of the phenomenon under review) and characteristic elements of Abkhazian *atalychestvo*.

Relations of milk-kinship were established between families belonging to different clans. True, in rather rare cases, these relations were also encountered within a given clan, but this should be seen as a feature of a secondary custom, wholly dependent upon the feudal system. From the circle of persons between whom the practice of milk-kinship was acceptable were equally excluded representatives of the maternal family. That is to say, as a customary rule, the *atalyk* and his ward absolutely had to belong to completely different clans (later this meant carriers of surnames), which had no kinship-relation of any sort between them.

Such was for the latest period the essence of *atalychestvo*. But there are certain, albeit indistinct, indications that in ancient times children used to be given out not to any alien family but to a definite family: predominantly, it would seem, to that of the mother.

We have already seen that individual indigenous Abkhazian families (Adzinba-Marshan, Ax^Wba-Achba, T^W'anba-Lak'rba, K'vits'inia-Chachba, etc.) were linked, so to speak, through inheritance by links of *atalychestvo* between them; the milk-kinship between them was renewed as it 'aged'. Deviation from this practice or change of the ward sometimes met with palpable opposition on the part of the family-group of former wards.

Interesting in this connection is the historical legend adduced above about the oldest (as popularly supposed) princely family, Achba, representative of which took for fostering (or according to one variant, by abduction) the heir of 'the ruler of Abkhazia' (ა.პ.ს.'ჩა). Returning the foster-child, they demanded of his parents to compensate them with land where they could settle for the hardships in fostering. The ruler had to yield to the fosterers his own land and to renounce the throne as well as abandon forever the confines of his principedom. He left them only one 'servant' without name, family or tribe. The latter, before becoming ruler, asked Prince Achba to provide him with a fitting surname, and they styled him Chachba, which became the family-name of the rulers of Abkhazia. Very characteristic is the ending of the legend, which is common to all its variants, and which has become a saying. That is why this epilogue reads: 'You can't say Chachba without saying Achba' ('atjba wam.'ჩ^Wa.k^W'a 'tjatjba

wə.z.'hʷə.wə.m). Consider, firstly, the obscurity of the family-name of the 'Abkhazian ruler', and secondly (especially) the surprising similarity in the forms of the aforementioned surnames (Achba and Chachba), the former of which is pertinaciously deemed the older; and consider, thirdly, the indissoluble link existing between them in the past. Given these factors, one might draw a number of inferences, namely that: (a) the Achba surname once represented the maternal family with regard to the offspring of the named ruler; (b) the latter rulership was still transferred within the Achba family, regardless of the already completed resettlement of the wife to the territory of the husband; and (c) the children went on taking their name and also inheritance according to the mother's line, to which the expressive ending of the legend beautifully bears witness: 'You can't say Chachba without saying Achba'.

As for the personal name, it was assigned to the ward not by the parents but most commonly, as we have seen, within the family-group of the *atalyk*. This practice, also reflecting vestiges of matriarchy, kept its power until the very last period of the existence of the *atalyk*-custom. Indeed, on the day the child was taken away for fostering, the *atalyk* was accompanied, amongst other persons, by a special 'cradle-carrier' (ə.'gərə.gə.ɸə), who significantly could not be a member of the *atalyk*'s family-group but had to be an outsider, a neighbour. These are, in all probability, all distant echoes of that same era of transitionality. Earlier, children were transferred to the family of the mother. Here already, in place of this, they are given out to *atalyks*. The 'carrier of the cradle' serves, as it were, in the role of witness or guarantor that the child is taken not to the maternal but to an outsider's family, which, in consequence, has no right to appropriate him but must return him to his home in the course of the time delimited.

The very term 'cradle' (ə.'gərə), differing only by placement of the stress from the word 'to carry' (ə.gə.'rə), may have appeared, like the entity designated by it at that very epoch: it, thus, serves as a *sui generis* reflection of the one-time transfer of children or of their 'carrying over' in the cradle to the maternal family. Is not this the very point of the old custom whereby the cradle was sure to be delivered for the babe, along with other necessary children's things, by the infant's grandmother on the mother's side?

The variety of lullabies also merits attention. There can be no argument that virtually all of them are of ancient content, and almost all of them are typically dedicated not to blood-, but to foster-children. Characteristic also is the fact that these lullabies often seem to accustom the child to the absence of the parents and soothe him, saying that the mother and father will come soon, that the mother is sitting not far away, in the shade of a tree; that the father has gone to have a meal of sour milk and will shortly return; that, when they come, they will bring him something nice, etc. Does not this underline

the tradition according to which the parents, especially the young father, did not visit their child while he was being fostered?

The length of the period of fostering has real significance. Formerly, the fostering period extended up to the coming of age. But it tended to be reduced, and, in the latest period, it lasted in general up to just two to three years.

To understand *atalychestvo* it is especially necessary to set apart two moments: the taking of the child by the *atalyk* and the return home of the ward into his own family-group. This taking away was seemingly not accompanied by the performance of any special rites or ceremonies in the latest period among the Abkhazians. But certain symbolic actions, it seems, took place earlier all the same. For example, the hand or leg of the expectant mother used to be bound with a red thread by the future fosterers as a sign that the child to be born would belong to them and that the parents would not give it out to anyone else. Is not this symbolic act a remnant of the old maternal right, in accordance with which are understood the claims of the members of the family upon the sister and her offspring?

It seems to me that it will not be unjustified to compare the ancient Abkhazian practice just remarked upon with curious references by Reineggs to efforts on the part of an *atalyk* to establish that the child taken by him is identical to the youth being returned to his parents. Not having to hand the original, I shall adduce the description by Reineggs present in the account of Dubois. Dubois, arbitrarily identifying the institution of *atalychestvo* with practices of the ancient Greeks, wrote:

Among the princes it is customary to entrust to the care of a vassal their sons from a young age... just like Peleus, entrusting his son Achilles to the care of the centaur Chiron. We see that even now everything proceeds just as in the time of Interiano (mid-sixteenth century). The same system of fostering exists among the Abkhazians and in part among the Georgians. Reineggs adduces wholly curious details about how this unique appropriation of a child was accomplished; the author relates how many laborious and careful efforts were taken by the *atalyk* in the presence of a family of witnesses and with their coöperation so that later it might be possible to prove common identity with the youth returning to the paternal home. V. 1, 251⁶⁶.

The return of the ward to the paternal home did not proceed so easily and simply or by way of a one-scene act, but rather, as it were, in two stages: sometimes for the first time they would conduct the child to its parents simply for show, usually at the expiry of the period of breast-feeding; the second or final return took place significantly later, often as the ward reached the age of maturity.

⁶⁶Fr. Dubois [de Montpéroux] *Journey around the Caucasus*, Sukhum, 1937, p. 43. [cf. Jacob Reineggs *Allgemeine historisch-topographische Beschreibung des Kaukasus: herausgegeben von F.E. Schröder. 2 Theile*, 1796, and François Dubois de Montpéroux *Voyage autour du Caucase, chez les Tcherkesses et les Abkhases, en Colchide, en Géorgie, en Arménie et en Crimée. 6 vols & atlas*, 1839-43 -- Translator].

One of the decisive keys to solving the problem of the genesis of *atalychestvo* in the Caucasus is, without doubt, analysis of the surviving kinship- and marriage-relationships preserved among the Abkhazians, echoes of a quite archaic familial and social life that are, as is well-known, of interest to scholarship.

I believe it possible to raise the question -- without, however, pre-judging it -- of the connection of one of the most interesting survivals of ancient Abkhazian ethnography: namely, *atalychestvo*'s connection with the special marriage-building known as *а.м.ѡ.ѡ.*, occasionally found up to the present time at the groom's place (although originally it was constructed on the land of the bride's clan). M. Sigorskij writes: 'With the journey of a woman to her parents at the time of the first confinement and with the abandonment of the infant in a different mountain-village [or 'aul' according to Caucasian terminology -- Translator] it is necessary to link the custom of giving out children to an outside-family for fostering, the so-called custom of *atalychestvo*, characteristic for the western and central autochthons (i.e. for the Abkhaz-Adyghe-Kabardian tribes)⁶⁷.

No less important is analysis of the relevant data of the Abkhaz language, including comparison of these data with the relevant linguistic materials of the other Caucasian languages. Up until now these data have been almost completely ignored for the solving of the given problem. The Abkhazian terminology even allows us to develop and substantiate the thoughts of M.O. Kosven, viz. his fundamental proposition about relationships between related cognate stocks lying at the root of the relationship of *atalychestvo*.

As we know, no primary references have indeed been preserved of the fact of children being handed out to specifically the maternal family. None the less, a range of considerations pertaining to the study of this institution incline one to suppose that there did exist a transitional period when, regardless of the already completed resettlement of the wife to the husband's place, children still continued to transfer to the family of the mother. On the basis of the Abkhazian materials, one of the important arguments in favour of such a proposition is the relevant nomenclature from the basic lexicon of the Abkhaz language. The fact is that among the Abzhywans [Central Abkhazians] male and female wards alike designate the kin-group of the fosterer by means of a term which has a multitude of contextual meanings: namely, *'а.б.ѡ.а.*, which, when directly translated, signifies 'fathers', 'ancestors', 'kin of the *atalyk*', whilst at the same time the kin-group of the ward himself is not distinguished by any special term. Among the Bzyp Abkhazians, a wife significantly refers by the same term to her own parents, and partly in extension to all other members of the family from which she came. It is not only the natal daughters of the fosterers but also all the women in their family that

⁶⁷M. Sigorskij 'Marriage and Marriage-customs in the Caucasus', *Ethnography*, 1930, No. 3.

wards designate by the expression 'sisters by milk', as one can approximately translate the relevant term (ა.'bzətq^wა.ჩ^w.jა), whilst the natal sons of the fosterers and generally all the males in their family they designate by the expression 'brothers by milk' (ა.'bzətq^wა.jა). Naturally, the question arises as to how a person, fostered among strangers, was able to style these last 'fathers', similarly to how a woman does this in relation to the very family from which she came. It remains to propose the existence of a special era when, regardless of the resettlement of the wife to the husband's place (patrilocal marriage), their children for the duration of a certain transitional period were all the same deemed to belong to the mother's family, in the company of which they received their practical upbringing.

Important also is the fact that the family of the fosterer names its own foster-child by the word 'ა.χ^wა.ჰა. Consequently, 'ა.χ^wა.ჰა is both 'foster-son' and 'foster-daughter'. The word in the most convincing translation means 'price [ა.'χ^wა] of, or recompense for, the daughter [ა.'ჰა]'. This again is an indicative fact. It is impossible to lose sight of the fact that this term is applied to both a foster-son and a foster-daughter independently of their sex. Furthermore, the wife's mother and the husband's mother are indifferently designated as 'ან^wა, and the wife's sister and the husband's sister as 'ან^wა.ჰა. In all these three compound-words the radical element is ან 'mother', or ა.'ჰა 'daughter'. From this it is clear that the mother, her daughter and the children of her daughters terminologically constitute one, originally single set, which corresponds with the notions of matriarchy.

In the custom of *atalychestvo* among the Abkhazians we must pay attention to yet one more moment: the presentation by the fosterers of the ward to its parents. Customarily, several years after the moment of taking the child into fosterage, the fosterers dressed their fosterling in all new clothing, sat him on a steed, took along with them different products (and sometimes even an animal for sacrifice), and in the company of their relatives and other respected persons set out for the home of the ward's parents. This procession, with the stated aim of returning the ward to the paternal home, and endowed with a wholly solemn character, is known by the mysterious term *tṣa.γ.ra.tṣa.'ra*, which holds for us a very important meaning; it comes from 'ა.tṣa.γა 'mother of the ward, -tṣa (for the wet-nurse), parents of the son-in-law or daughter-in-law (for the parents of the husband or wife)⁶⁸. This word is linked etymologically with the words 'ა.tṣa 'sister-in-law, daughter-in-law', 'ა.tṣa.lა 'wife's husband's brother', and 'ა.j.ა.tṣa.lა.tṣ^wა 'wives of brothers (in relation to one another)'.

⁶⁸Anatolij N. Genko *loc. cit.* p. 16. [N.B. in Genko's recently, and thus posthumously, published *Abkhaz-Russian Dictionary* of 1998 we have the lemma: *ა.tṣa.γ.'ra* 'first presentation by the fosterers of the ward to the parents'; *tṣa.γ.ra.tṣa.'ra* 'journey of the fosterers with the ward to its parents' -- Translator]

I shall note merely that the last part of the word *tsə.y.ra.tsə.'ra* (namely, *ə.tsə.'ra*), which is normally suffixed to it (although the word is also used without such an addition), means 'to go; going'⁶⁹. In the said case the ward 'goes' not from his own, it is true, maternal family but from an entirely different, outsider family; but this circumstance must be recognised, clearly, as a later, secondary phenomenon.

All this taken together irrefutably testifies to the fact that the Abkhazian materials in themselves represent exceptional value: not only for understanding the essence of the indigenous national practice of fostering children according to the system of '*əadza.ra* ['rearing']; but more generally to the fact that they are especially important for the solving of many questions relating to the difficult, complex, and as yet unsatisfactorily elaborated problem of the genesis and further historical developments or transformations of *atalychestvo* in the Caucasus⁷⁰.

⁶⁹P'et're Ch'araia gives the word '*ə.tsə.y.ə*' as meaning 'parents of a son-in-law and daughter-in-law', but N. Džhanashia uses the expression 'mother of the foster-child' (Nikolaj Ja. Marr *Abkhaz-Russian Dictionary*, Leningrad, 1926, pp. 108-9).

⁷⁰[A somewhat shorter version of this article, entitled 'The social reality of *atalychestvo* in Abkhazia in the 19th century', was published in] *Works of the Abkhazian Institute of Language, Literature and History*, XXVII, Sukhum, 1956, pp. 71-125. The version here translated appeared in the author's *Works (Materials and Investigations into Questions concerning the Historical Ethnography of the Abkhazian People)* [in Russian], published in 1988 in Sukhum by the publishing-house Alashara, 117-188.