Yet a third consideration of *Völker, Sprachen und Kulturen des südlichen Kaukasus*

or

sinte muoti gok'o, utole rek da?

'Why do you want light, if you are blind?' (Mingrelian proverb)

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The *Mitteilungsblatt der Berliner Georgischen Gesellschaft* (No. 22, 1993) published an article entitled *Völker, Sprachen und Kulturen des südlichen Kaukasus* by the German specialist on Laz, Wolfgang Feurstein, who presented a summary of views he had expressed at greater length in his *Mingrelisch, Lazisch, Svanisch: alte Sprachen und Kulturen der Kolchis vor dem baldigen Untergang* (see **Caucasian Perspectives**, ed. George Hewitt, 1992.285-328). This was followed in No. 24 (1994) by a response from the German Kartvelologist, Winfried Boeder, with the title *Noch einmal 'Völker, Sprachen und Kulturen des südlichen Kaukasus'.* I think there is scope for a wider contribution to this debate concerning the correct interpretation of the fate of the Mingrelian and Svan languages within the (erstwhile Soviet) Republic of Georgia, and this is the reason for the present article.

Boeder asks to whom in Georgia Feurstein's charge could possibly apply that they deem Mingrelian to be superfluous or identify those who speak out in defence of Mingrelian as promoters of separatism. Whilst acknowledging that there was a 'Stalinist repression' of the language, he observes that 'a hundred-year long awakened Mingrelian-Georgian functional bilingualism is not of itself a sign of repression,' advancing the hypothesis that '«Georgianness» and «Mingrelianness» can be entirely mutually compatible aspects of Mingrelian identity', a possibility which he pines has been harmed of late by demagoguery -- whose demagoguery he does not, however, vouchsafe to tell us. The answer to the question posed by Boeder should be clear by the end of the present paper -- and, to anticipate, it will be 'the Georgian establishment/elite'. This will be demonstrated to be so whether one is speaking of (i) the final quarter of the 19th century, when what we understand today by the term 'Georgia' was split into *gubernates* within the Russian Empire, (ii) the period of independent Menshevik Georgia (1918-1921), (iii) Soviet Georgia of the 1920s-1930s, or (iv) the frenzied atmosphere of pre-post- and post-Soviet Georgia.

The full range of the debate for the earliest of the four periods is somewhat unclear, for the only sources available to me are the writings of Iak'ob Gogebashvili (specifically: *An Evil Desire in connection with Mingrelia* of 1902, *On the Question of Mingrelian Primary Schools* of 1903, *Secular Schools in Mingrelia* of 1903, all three essays being most recently published in volume II of the author's 5-volume *Selected Works* of 1990; *Nature's Door;* 1976 facsimile of the 1912 edition -- all in Georgian) and the two essays by Tedo Zhordania *The Fight for the Georgian Language in the Years 1802-1910* and *Who Defended the Georgian Language in Mingrelia's Church Schools?* which were published together as a pamphlet in 1913 in Kutaisi (again in Georgian). It would seem from the above polemical writings that there was an unsuccessful attempt in the 1880s, repeated in the 1890s, to replace church-services in Mingrelia that had hitherto been conducted in Georgian with a Mingrelian liturgy, for which

purpose the Gospels had been translated into Mingrelian[1]. There was also a move to replace Georgian with Mingrelian in schools within Mingrelia, which aroused particularly acute passions in 1902. We shall look at the details of the plans for schooling shortly, but let us first cast an eye over the sort of arguments advanced by Gogebashvili and Zhordania, as these are especially pertinent to any reply to Boeder's questions.

Gogebashvili's first essay argues in favour of the language of tuition in Mingrelia and Svanetia being the 'mother-tongue' and not some 'local dialect/argot', from which we conclude that for Gogebashvili Mingrelian and Svan are dialects/argots, whereas the native mother-tongue for Mingrelians and Svans must be Georgian. Let us see this in his own words: 'It is well-known that every race has [both] a main language which represents a common treasury for every part of this race and is called its mother-tongue, as well as tribal dialects/argots which are used locally... In all schools tuition is appointed in the mother-tongue, and they use local dialects/argots to explain and define those common words which local children do not understand well... Such an intelligent practice existed in our Georgia also from the time that our race accepted christianity and built schools for itself. Beginning with the 4th century to the present day in all our schools, from the Black Sea to the borders of Daghestan, only books written in the common literary mother-tongue were used. In order to explain locally non-understandable words and phrases the teachers would use in speech local terms and phrases, for example, in Mingrelia and Svanetia, and together with learning they would spread a complete understanding of the mother-tongue... Only among us and nowhere else whether among the Armenians, or the Tatars, or any other Caucasians has there appeared an individual so lacking in intelligence and backward-looking as to say that teaching in schools should be in tribal dialects/argots and not in the mother-tongue. But among us there have come to the fore people so wretched in intelligence who have dared to express the view that the mother-tongue should be expelled from the schools of Mingrelia and Svanetia, as the people here use local dialects/argots. What does the fulfilment, the realisation of this backward opinion betoken for us?.. It's a good while since a certain Caucasian race ripped off from our homeland a huge eastern area, namely the Zakatala region... But the devil does not sleep. He has conceived a yearning to split, dismember, break up from the shores of the Black Sea and weaken the very homeland of the Western Georgians. And the means too he soon found: the breaking away of Mingrelia and Svanetia, their separation from the common earth, from the common homeland' (vol.II, pp.358-359).

From Gogebashvili's second article let us quote the following: 'The Mingrelians, who accepted christianity three centuries earlier than the eastern Georgians, glorified the saviour Christ and performed their worship in their fundamental language, Georgian, and this they did entirely through their own volition and at the bidding of their social instinct... From the start they acknowledged the Georgian alphabet to be their own alphabet, and they deemed the Georgian language to be their own literary language, whilst they used their provincial dialect only domestically' (pp.460-461).

Here we have the essence of the 'pan-Georgian' doctrine, which, despite refinements and slight alterations, has largely remained unaltered ever since:

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[1]Selected passages from the Gospels in Mingrelian may be consulted in A. Tsagareli *Mingrel\skie etjudy, pervyj vypusk, mingrel\skie teksty* (St. Petersburg, 1880).

Mingrelian and Svan are dialects/argots of Georgian, which latter is thus their mother-tongue; as mother-tongue it has been taught in Mingrelian and Svan schools and has been used by them for writing and worship since christianity arrived in the 4th century. Attempts either to teach, or to encourage them to pray in, Mingrelian or Svan is tantamount to divorcing them from their common 'Georgian' homeland, which would thus be threatened with division and disintegration. Are these arguments convincing? I maintain they are not.

There is no argument about the genetic relationship which holds between Georgian, Mingrelian and, more distantly, Svan[2]. If one accepts uncritically the Gogebashvili logic, one would have to conclude that the Svans and Mingrelians developed their own unique languages (which are not mutually intelligible either with Georgian or with each other), whilst also having (the separately developing) Georgian as their 'mother-tongue'. This is surely a plain absurdity. As regards schooling, are we seriously meant to assume that every child on what is today Georgian territory has actually undergone schooling (let alone in Georgian-language schools) for the last 17 centuries since christianity, followed by the Georgian script, was introduced such that over this period Georgian has been taught unbroken to Georgian, Mingrelian and Svan children? How many other countries can one name that have possessed universal schooling for 17 centuries? I suggest it is not a matter of naming other countries but any country. It is a well-known fact that, when Soviet power was established, one of its most pressing problems was the widespread illiteracy that it inherited from the Russian Empire. Even in 1913 there existed for the whole of Georgia a mere 733 primary schools and 34 secondary schools, which accommodated only one third of those of school-age. It was only with the introduction by the Soviets (i.e. from the early 1920s) of universal schooling that all children of school-age received even an elementary education[3]. So where were the schools from the 4th to the early 20th century to teach ordinary Mingrelians and Svans the Georgian language? Accepting, as we must, that none, or at best hardly any, such existed, can we conclude from the use of (Old!) Georgian as the language of worship in Orthodox churches in Mingrelia and Svanetia that ordinary worshippers were fully competent in their devotional tongue? This argument is often advanced not only with reference to Mingrelians and Svans but with even greater implausibility in relation to the totally unrelated Abkhazians to suggest that all these peoples have not only always known Georgian but have actually identified themselves as Georgians. Again, I respectfully suggest, this is patently nonsensical. Writing in the 17th century Don Giuseppe Giudice surely drew the correct analogy when he wrote: 'The Mingrelians are Orthodox christians and preserve the rites of Greek worship. Though the Mingrelian language represents a separate language and differs from all the rest, yet sacred and secular books are read in Georgian and they perform church-services too in the Georgian language, just as Europeans consider Latin their ecclesiastical language. At the same time at the court of the prince they and the grandees also use the Georgian language as being more refined and honoured...' (*Letters about Georgia, 17th century*, pages 92-93 of the Georgian text published in 1964). Simply because most of mediæval (and not just mediæval) Europe used Latin at church, had Latin inscriptions emblazoned in their stained-glass windows, and leading

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[2]As almost all the Laz live outside Georgia in modern-day Turkey, I leave the Laz language out of the discussion, merely noting that it stands very close to Mingrelian.

[3]I knew an old Mingrelian lady who was over school-age when Soviet power arrived and who was illiterate when she died in the 1980s.

scholar-clerics conversed in Latin, did this mean that the states concerned were 'Roman' realms (sc. in a civic sense) or that any such person considered Latin his native tongue?! And equally how much Latin can the mass of uneducated peasantry be expected to have known? I suggest that an exactly parallel situation will have existed in Mingrelia and Svanetia as regards knowledge of Georgian (viz. it was read, understood and spoken to a greater or less degree by aristocrats and clerics exclusively).

Gogebashvili claimed that there was 18th century evidence for widespread knowledge of Georgian among Mingrelians. He wrote: 'For example, according to the report of the French traveller Chardin, who visited Mingrelia at the start of the 18th century, Catholic missionaries living and preaching in Mingrelia, after learning the Mingrelian dialect, easily understood the Georgian language too. The same Chardin adduces in evidence the information from missionaries that almost all Mingrelians well understand Georgian and use it freely' (p.463). In an admittedly cursory perusal of the unindexed Georgian translation of Chardin (1975) in order to confirm this claim by Gogebashvili I was unable to locate it. I did, however, come across a number of observations of immediate relevance to our current theme: 'Nor have I spoken with a single Mingrelian about religion, since I couldn't make contact with any such as knew the meaning of religion, law, sin, Holy Sacrament or the worship of God' (p.127); 'To be ordained as a priest [sc. in Mingrelia] it is not necessary to be educated; it is enough that you know how to read and to learn by heart the service, which you repeat the course of your whole life' (p.143); and most significantly, 'The service is conducted in the literary Georgian language, which is as difficult for their [sc. Mingrelians'] clergy to understand as Latin is for our peasants' (p.159, stress added) -- if even the clergy in Mingrelia, capable merely of reading and writing, had difficulty understanding the devotional language, what could be expected of the mass of peasantry? If these peasants could not understand the language of any services they may have attended, it is hardly surprising that they failed to understand the concepts of their nominal religion. Other sources present a similar picture. In the travel-diary of Johannes de Galonifontibus of 1404 we read: 'To the east of them [Abkhazians], in the direction of Georgia, lies the country called Mingrelia... They have their own language' (L. Tardy 'The Caucasian Peoples and their Neighbours in 1404', in *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hung: Tomus XXXII (1), 83-11*). The royal geographer/historian, Prince Vakhusht' (1696-1756), speaking of the linguistic situation in Mingrelia (Odishi) says (to quote Besarion Jorbenadze's 1991 *The Kartvelian Languages and Dialects*): 'Noblemen speak Georgian but have their home-language as well [Mingrelian is meant]' (pp.11-12) -- I conclude from this that, if Vakhusht' thought it necessary to note that Mingrelian nobles spoke Georgian, this statement did not apply to the mass of Mingrelians. For Svan at the end of the 19th century we have the evidence of the native of Ushguli, Besarion Nizharadze, who in a short article entitled *The spread of the Georgian language in Svanetia* commented favourably on the speed with which Georgian was being acquired at the time by especially male Svans, who learned it while spending the winter-months working outside their snowed-in Svanetia down in the Georgian lowlands: of the 290 males in Ushguli 160 knew Georgian (compared with just 4 in 1870); in K'ala out of 219 males 199 knew Georgian (compared with 6 in 1870); in Ipari out of 546 males 306 knew Georgian (compared with 3 in 1870) (*Historical-Ethnographical Articles, I*, 169-172, 1964). If Georgian was spreading in Svanetia only at the end of the last century, I suggest that we have to conclude that it cannot have been (universally) known there before. Of course, it is not

impossible that in the glory-days of mediæval Georgia, from David IV, known as The Builder (1089-1125), to the Golden Age under Tamar (1184-1213), Georgian might have been better known both in Mingrelia and in Svanetia as a result both of closer contact between the far-flung parts of a then peaceful and united Georgia and of a possible greater emphasis on educational opportunities that might have come with the prosperity of the time and a possibly consequential emphasis on the dissemination of culture, though this is pure speculation, unsupported as far as I know by historical evidence. The above-picture, however, is far from the one we are given from the early 15th century Johannes de Galonifontibus through to the arrival of the Soviets.

Tedo Zhordania, himself a Mingrelian from MækW in Abkhazia, went to even greater extremes of hyperbolic fantasy than Gogebashvili, as we can read for ourselves in his account of his meeting with the Exarch in Tbilisi: 'Don't lose your temper with me and I'll tell the truth to you, you are lovers of the truth, with holy understanding give me permission, and I am hopeful that I shall entirely convince you that you, the governing-body of schools, are deeply and sadly mistaken or else they are leading you astray when they try to make you believe that Mingrelians do not understand Georgian -- Mingrelian is the Old Georgian language' (p.32, stress added). Or again: 'I wrote, I clearly and publicly revealed, I published and I sent to the government, did I not, that I consider Mingrelians to be Georgians, and the Mingrelian language to be the Georgian language?' (p.62). Interestingly on page 25 Zhordania actually lets the cat out of the bag as far as knowledge of Georgian in Svanetia at the time is concerned when he states: 'That the Svans do not understand the Georgian language -- about this the council didn't raise a sound.'

How do we explain the extraordinary wildness of some of these statements from Gogebashvili and Zhordania? Though Georgia was saved from total rape and pillage by Turkey and especially Persia when annexed by Holy Russia[4], Russia can hardly be said to have behaved generously to the fellow christian state that had (semi-)voluntarily given it its first real foothold in Transcaucasia. Georgian language and culture were repressed for much of the 19th century, Georgian being replaced as official language by Russian, and the autocephaly of the Georgian Church being unceremoniously removed in 1811. There was no unified Georgian state within the overall structure of the Empire, for the country was split into separate *gubernias*. A malaise came over the Georgian population, such that the very survival of the culture seemed to be under threat, the capital Tbilisi becoming more an Armenian and Russian town than a Georgian one. A national-revivalist movement sprang up in the third quarter of the century under the leadership of Prince (now Saint) Ilia Ch'avch'avadze. The movement sought to re-awaken pride in being a Georgian among the population at large by emphasising the (undeniably) great cultural heritage of Georgia, the uniqueness of the Georgian language, and the antiquity of Georgian (Orthodox) christianity and literature. The educationalist Gogebashvili was active in the movement and himself formed in 1879 **The Society for the Spread of Literacy among the Georgians** -- it must logically follow, of course, from the need for such a society that most Georgians (let alone Mingrelians and Svans) must have been illiterate at the time. As an ancient but tiny people in a vast empire, the

[4]Only central and eastern Georgia were annexed to Russia in 1801< Mingrelia followed in 1803 (though administering its own affairs until 1857), and the western province of Imereti in 1804. Svanetia was not totally controlled until as late as 1883! Abkhazia came under Russian protection in 1810, administering its own affairs until 1864.

Georgians, especially their intellectual leaders, must have wished to make the strongest case possible when it came to defending their rights to territory and language-use. This was almost certainly why at just this time we start to find references not only to Mingrelian and Svan being dialects of Georgian but also to even Abkhaz as having similar status[5]! When in the 1920s the Soviets created writing-systems for a whole range of previously unwritten languages, they did this in the (surely correct) belief that the best way to eradicate illiteracy was through a person's mother-tongue[6]. It was probably as a result of observations that Mingrelians in the mass did not at the time understand Georgian (inside or outside church) -- and I am firmly convinced that, in the mass, they did not -- that the authorities decided there was a need to serve their spiritual needs by providing them with a liturgy which they could properly understand. If this had as a consequence that they would be weaned away from Georgian influence, then the imperial authorities would no doubt have regarded this as a bonus, but I see no necessary justification in accusing those academics, usually Russian, who effectively began Caucasian studies by collecting and publishing folk-tales and songs, by investigating unknown languages and actually writing grammars of them of being primarily motivated by a desire to implement a state-policy of *Divide et impera*.Even when it came to the publication in 1899 of the 100-page *Mingrelskaja Azbuka*[7], it does not follow that the primary purpose was to split the Mingrelians from the Georgians. Mingrelians have and had their own language, quite separate from Georgian; they do not and did not understand Georgian without special instruction (in school or elsewhere) -- surely any dispassionate observer would naturally conclude that they deserved to be taught their own language? Living in the Russian Empire all non-Russians needed to learn Russian (and its Cyrillic script), and so why not kill two birds with one stone and devise a Cyrillic-based script as a vehicle for the Mingrelians both to learn their own language and as a tool to help them on their way to learning Russian[8]? The *Mingrelian Alphabet* of 1899 contained just such a Cyrillic-based script, and the compiler/editor (the only clue to his identity in the book are the initials M.Z.) was quite open about the aims of the volume on the final page of the Introduction, where we read: "The *Mingrelskaja Azbuka* is published exclusively with the aim of facilitating for Mingrelian children their assimilation of reading and writing in Russian". Nevertheless, one can appreciate the danger that must have been felt by the Georgian nationalist movement, which no doubt saw the possibly imminent loss of a portion of the Kartvelian (if not the true

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[5]As early as 1853 Dimit\ri Q\ipiani was claiming Kartvelian status for Abkhazians.

[6]In support of their conviction that Russia has always used Abkhazia as a mere device to engineer political discord in Georgia, Georgians often point to the awarding by the Soviets of literary status to Abkhaz. This, they claim, is what initially encouraged the Abkhazians to think of themselves as a distinct people, which led (inevitably, according to Georgian logic) to demands for separate political status. The implication behind this charge is that, had no award of literary status to Abkhaz occurred in the 1920s, the Abkhazians would have been assimilated, and possibly content to be assimilated, by the Georgians. No thought is given to the fact that Abkhaz is a separate language with a right to have its own literature, that Abkhazians have never regarded themselves as Georgians and that Abkhazia became politically subordinate to Tbilisi only in 1931 by *fiat* of (Georgian) Stalin.

[7]The publication in 1864 of a similar *Lushnu Anban -- Svanetskaja Azbuka* with Cyrillic-based script is believed to have been compiled by the father of Caucasian philology, Baron Peter von Uslar, for Svan.

[8]Actually I find myself in sympathy with the criticisms of this Cyrillic-based script offered by Gogebashvili on page 467. It would have been interesting to discover what the general reaction throughout Georgia would have been, had this early attempt to teach Mingrelian been accompanied by the use of the Georgian-script (plus the two extra characters required for Mingrelian) which Tsagareli had employed in both volumes of his Mingrelian Studies twently years previously.

Georgian) historical homeland, stretching from Daghestan to Abkhazia, as a result of these manœuvres. The educated Mingrelian élite (to which Zhordania evidently belonged), who, as a consequence of having had their education in Georgian, will have been more inclined to identify themselves as 'Georgian', to see themselves as sharing in the great Georgian cultural heritage, and to have aligned themselves with the Georgian view in this matter, might well have honestly felt that it was in the interests of all Mingrelians to cleave to Georgian identity and culture, though the possible role of purely personal ambition can most assuredly not be excluded. However, although we read in Gogebashvili and Zhordania that the attempted introduction of both a Mingrelian liturgy and Mingrelian schooling, at the expense of Georgian in both instances, was met with universal hostility, I would prefer to see this stated by more objective witnesses before I accept it as fact, and, as noted above, I unfortunately have no such evidence at my disposal.

It remains to examine the actual proposals for the reform of schooling that caused such a caustic reaction in 1902, for here we might have a clue as to why Gogebashvili and Zhordania felt it necessary to resort to what they must have known was pure deception, namely that Mingrelian is a mere dialect of Georgian (or possibly indeed none other than the Old Georgian language!). In his 1912 *Nature's Door* Gogebashvili does not repeat his earlier misleading statements, though he does still insist that Mingrelians all know Georgian well: 'Only by language are they [Mingrelians] somewhat separate, but this language [Mingrelian] too is a blood-brother of the Georgian language. Apart from this, almost all Mingrelians know well how to speak Georgian, and they love the Georgian language greatly' (p.497).

Zhordania (1913:47-49) tells us that, according to the 1884 Education Programme, all schools in the Empire were to be categorised into one of three types: in Type 1 schools, where service and prayers were in the vernacular, this vernacular was also taught; Type 2 schools were those where children of varying nationalities were taught; in Type 3 schools there were no services or prayers in any local language, and in neither Type 2 nor Type 3 was any vernacular taught. In 1882 Zhordania had engineered the establishment of a Georgian 'faculty' in all church-schools, where in 1883 seven lessons a week were devoted to Georgian; this rose to nine in 1884 and to eleven in 1885. A parallel programme was introduced in church primary schools from 1894, where there were twelve weekly lessons in Georgian, as opposed to six for Russian; in 1902 the number of lessons rose to eighteen. With specific reference to Mingrelia, Zhordania in 1896 was given responsibility for a nominal 64 church primary schools in the districts of Mingrelia itself plus the neighbouring Georgian-speaking province of Guria, whose number rose to 232 within seven years because, he says, the teaching of Georgian within them proved so attractive to all concerned. A certain Ianovski seems to have had Georgian banned from local state-schools in Mingrelia, and so parents transferred their children to the church-schools to gain some tuition for them in Georgian. Seeking to remove Georgian entirely from Mingrelia, Ianovski and his supporters evidently tried also to remove Georgian prayers from the schools so that they could then replace them in churches as well. Ianovski had the Georgian prayers translated into Mingrelian and sought backing from the Exarch for the introduction of these in schools. As we saw above, Zhordania strongly argued against this.

In deciding how a given school was to be classified it was in theory necessary to bear in mind this instruction: 'If it should happen that Georgians of any region have lost their native language or if they use a language, albeit one with a common Kartvelian root, which so diverges from pure Georgian that the population does not understand the latter, then in such a case teaching in Georgian must not be allowed.' In 1902 the various regional committees were asked to examine the classification of the schools in their region. In responding to this request the Imeretian committee, which had responsibility for schools in Svanetia, baldly stated that all belonged to Type 1, despite the fact that Svans did not understand Georgian, as admitted by even Zhordania (p.25). Zhordania then advised his own committee in the Mingrelian port of Poti to follow the lead of the Imeretians, namely that they should turn a blind eye to any lack of knowledge of Georgian in Mingrelia, arguing that, if questions were subsequently raised, the answer should be 'that Mingrelians are Georgians and understand Georgian' (p.26)[9].

If one accepts, and there is no reason not to, that Russian domination of Mingrelia at the end of the 19th century will have been resented there[10] as much as it seems to have been in truly Georgian provinces, then it is perfectly understandable if popular sentiment at the time throughout Mingrelia (not to speak of Georgia proper) will have placed solidarity with fellow-Kartvelians above the uncertainties of Russification, even if this meant sacrificing the chance to have their own language taught in schools, a proposal that might well have been viewed with great suspicion as being a possible short-term enticement. If the continuation of teaching Georgian depended on Mingrelians (and Svans) being classified as 'Georgians' with the implication that they thus understood the Georgian language, then one can appreciate how readily Georgians like Gogebashvili or Georgian-educated Mingrelians like Zhordania would have argued the case for the Georgianness of Mingrelians, soothing any reticence they may have felt at propagating such blatant falsehoods with a belief that the well-being of Mingrelians and Svans (along with their languages) would be best safeguarded in the longer term by keeping them closely allied with their fellow-Kartvelians (viz. the Georgians).

One would feel happier about judging the untruths in Gogebashvili and Zhordania to be justified by the prevailing circumstances, if one detected any feelings of respect for the Mingrelian language itself[11] in the writings of these advocates, but, one will look in vain for such respect in the three named essays by Gogebashvili. Railing against the Cyrillic-based Mingrelian alphabet of the *Mingrelskaja Azbuka*, he writes: 'Every alphabet only has reason and meaning when it represents the key to sacred and secular literature. On other occasions

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[9]The previous two paragraphs are taken almost verbatim from pages 127-128 of my article |Aspects of language planning in Georgia (Georgian and Abkhaz)\ in *Language Planning in the Soviet Union* (ed. Mike Kirkwood), Macmillan 1989, 123-144.

[10]As stated above, Russian control was finally established in that part of Upper Svanetia known as Free Svanetia only in the wake of an uprising in 1875-76 which saw the wanton destruction of the village of Khalde.

[11]One is tempted to add |and recognition of the need to prevent the extinction of these languages\, but perhaps this would be an overstatement. After all, it is really only with the influx of outsiders and the introduction of instant mass-communication through radio and television, broadcasting in foreign languages necessarily learnt at school (viz. Georgian and Russian for Mingrelia and Svanetia), that unwritten, untaught languages spoken by communities that are compact and, in the case of the Svans, remote become threatened, and this was not the case circa 1900.

its creation and study is a fruitless waste of time. To study in schools this sort of alphabet which has no corresponding support in life either in writing, or literary creations, or in public libraries, so fades from memory after a year or two that nothing more than an empty space remains of it. To put it another way, the alphabet is the key, but literature is the lock. 'What's the point of a key if the lock does not exist?' (p.465). Or consider what is revealed by the following comment: 'Teaching the divine creed in the undeveloped Mingrelian dialect, through which it is possible only to represent material things and material relations, is considered by the folk of Mingrelia to be a profanity of their religion and an abuse of their religious sentiments' (p.468). Mingrelian is presented as an undeveloped dialect, which is thus quite unsuitable as a vehicle for expressing holy concepts. The first quote hints at the strangely arrogant belief that we shall see characterised the most famous Georgian of all, who no doubt read much of Gogebashvili in his formative years, namely Stalin, to the effect that the possession of a written literature defines a culture, so that, if there is no written literature, almost by definition there can be no culture. Oral literature seems to be given no credit, and the question of how an ethnic group can acquire a written literature without the prior creation of a writing-system for their language is avoided. One gets the distinct impression that the opinion of Mingrelian amongst the intellectual élite around 1900 was no different from the one that led an earlier man of letters, Sulkhan Saba Orbeliani (fl. 1700), to define the Georgian word *ჭყურტული* 'twittering' as 'the distorted speech of Mingrelians or the noise of jays and magpies'.

If the authorities in Tbilisi (and perhaps we should also add Kutaisi) were in no position to do anything to benefit the Mingrelian and Svan languages (even supposing they wanted to) while Georgia was split into administrative districts of the Russian Empire, the opportunity to take some positive, beneficial action surely came when Tbilisi took control of Georgian affairs with the establishment in 1918 of an independent Menshevik Georgia, lead by (the Mingrelian!) Noë Zhordania. I am not, however, aware of any inclination on the part of the central authorities even to think about introducing some teaching of either Mingrelian or Svan, even as secondary languages to Georgian, in order to encourage local pride in them. On the other hand, it should be noted that in 1914, as a result of a programme of philological investigation devised by the half-Scottish, half-Georgian Nikolai Marr in St. Petersburg, Mingrelian had become perhaps the best described Caucasian language of its day with the appearance of I. Q'ipshidze's impressive *Grammatika Mingrel'skogo (Iverskogo) Jazyka s Hrestomatiej i Slovarëm* Another Georgian, Sh. Beridze, again at the bidding of Marr, was despatched to do field-work in Mingrelia in 1919 and produced as a result his *Megruli (Iveruli) Ena* 'The Mingrelian (Iberian) Language', only the first portion of the first part of which appeared in Tbilisi 'with the rights of a manuscript'(?) in 1920. The Introduction contains some observations which are rather pertinent to our present theme.

'A cultural group[12] founded in Poti and New Senak'i had taken the Mingrelian title **Mapalu**[13] had set itself the goals of widening the study of Mingrelia and the Mingrelian language, collecting folklore, studying ethnographically this

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[12]consisting mainly of Mingrelian students and young persons. The group was founded simultaneously in Poti and Senak\i in the middle of April 1919.

[13]*palua* |blossoming, flourishing\< *mapalu* should be compared with Latin *florendus,* Russian *tsvetajus"c"ij, proizrastajus"c"ij* ª|flowering\º.

corner of Georgia, publishing the best remains of this language, making available linguistic and ethnographic materials that are necessary to linguists, etc...

'As to what commotion burst out in the press and society at that time, the reader will see this in the newspapers (vid. *saxelmc'ifo sakme* No.540, *ertoba* 27th June 1919, *sak'art'velo* 30th June No.54, ibid. No.55, *p'iradi k'ilo* No.1 4th July, *sak'art'velo* Nos.133, 188 2nd Sept., ibid. No.193 7th Sept., etc..)

'Some detected «separatism» in their activity and censured them for treason, others detected corruption of pupils and the young, etc...

'In truth there was no reason for anger. The group had absolutely no political aims nor could they have had, for its members (teachers and students) had set only cultural work as their aim, of which I became convinced during my travels.

'Perhaps some trifling examples bear witness to something entirely different, but such examples are unimportant and can be the results sometimes of simple childish haste and intellectual mischievousness' (pp.7-8).

At the bottom of page 9 Beridze continues: 'By the way, great wrath was occasioned in the press by the speech of student M. K'-va, delivered in Mingrelian on the 18th May at the funeral of I. Meunargia in Tsaishi (*saxelmc'ifo gazeti* No.540; answer -- *sak'art'velo* No.134).

'The crime of the orator perhaps consisted in the fact that his speech was extremely, exceptionally refined Mingrelian[14]'.

Beridze stresses again on page 13 how some insisted on jumping to the (illogical) conclusion that Mingrelian cultural activity betokens separatism when he writes: 'Some looked upon scholarly work as the preaching of separatism. Such was the case in the Senak'i and Zugdidi regions, as well as in Samurzaq'ano'[15]. We abstract from these various quotations the conclusions that: (i) it was entirely upon the initiative of local Mingrelian teachers and students who sensed the need to take action that in 1919 a movement was formed to advance the study of Mingrelian language and culture, and (ii) this innocent (as Beridze himself was able to confirm) undertaking occasioned the (typically hysterical) reaction in the

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[14]Some people spoke to us as follows> M. K\-va annoyed the correspondent and those who share his opinions more by the great purity of the Mingrelian language than by the content of the speech or by the very act of delivering the speech in Mingrelian. That is to say, there occurred that which more than once apparently happened in old Russia, where the same Slav Russians persecuted the other Slav tongues (Ukrainian and Polish). Perhaps, incidentally, in this was depicted the Ukrainianisation of the Mingrelian language, its Provencçalisation. If it is worthy of censure to deliver a speech over a corpse in the Mingrelian language, why is it not worthy of censure that a member of the founding committee addresses the people in the Mingrelian language and explains to them the necessity of a one-off tax (September 1919, Mart\vili, Khobi, Zugdidi etc..< B. T-tia). We\ll recall that to mark the 50th anniversary of the death of Shevchenko permission was not given to the Ukrainians to deliver an oration in Ukrainian before his grave in 1911...

[15]Of Samurzaq\ano Beridze offers an observation which is of relevance both to the linguistic history of this part of Abkhazia and to our immediate concern of the extent to which Mingrelian speakers historically knew Georgian, when on page 20 he says> |So Samurzaq\ano (from the Ingur to the Ghalidzga, north to the gates of Ochamchira) should be styled a |Mingrelianised\ region, for you will be unable to hear here the Abkhaz language, as you could 30-50 years ago< Mingrelian predominates. The intelligentsia (Gali-Achigvara) know, or course, how to read and write in Russian, speak Mingrelian and do not know Georgian\ (stress added)...

Georgian press whereby its promoters were lambasted for the 'treason' of encouraging Mingrelia to separate from Georgia. Beridze by his comments shews himself to be an eminently sensible and detached observer of events in being well able to distinguish from each other the wholly distinct categories of (a) supporting a neglected language and its associated culture, and (b) advocating political independence for the region where the language in question is spoken.

In the 1926 Soviet census 242,990 declared Mingrelian nationality (with a further 40,000 stating Mingrelian to be their native language); 13,218 described themselves as Svans -- figures quoted from Wixman's *Language Aspects of Ethnic Patterns and Processes in the North Caucasus* (University of Chicago Press, 1980). Today there are no precise figures for the numbers of Mingrelians and Svans or for those having first- or second-speaker knowledge of these languages. Sometime around/after 1930 it seems to have been decided that these people were henceforth to be classified as 'Georgians'. Earlier in the 'twenties there had been a debate whether Mingrelian should have been included amongst the Soviet Union's so-called 'Young Written Languages', previously unwritten languages which had scripts created for them and thus gained the status of literary languages -- Abkhaz, as we have seen, was one such inside Georgia, and there were many others both within and beyond the Caucasus. The idea was apparently backed by the leading Mingrelian Bolshevik of his day, Isak' Zhvania, who also, it seems, advocated political autonomy for his native province, presumably within the overall structure of the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic, just as Georgia contained the autonomous republics of Abkhazia and Ach'ara plus the autonomous district of South Ossetia. A most revealing article on the topic appeared in **Literary Georgia** (in Georgian) on 3rd November 1989, written by none other than the then leading radical, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, himself a Mingrelian from the town of Abasha. This article deserves to be translated in full and widely disseminated for the benefit of those who do not read Georgian, since, like so many of the outpourings over recent years from nationalists in Georgia, it will surely strike the alert reader as actually supporting the case it seeks to damn.

Let us consider here just a small portion of the article. Speaking of the opposition to the replacement of Georgian by Mingrelian in Mingrelian schools around 1902-3, which we examined above, we read in the Gamsakhurdia article: 'Such an approach from the above-mentioned Georgian «nationalists» I. Zhvania calls a feudal approach, inappropriate for Lenin's Communist Party. Since the very sense of «Mingrelian» (*Margali*) signifies the lowest peasant stratum, the aristocracy of Mingrelia used not to consider themselves Mingrelian: «All privileged strata (aristocracy, clergy, intelligentsia) considered themselves Georgian.» Consequently, in Zhvania's words, the Transcaucasian governing body considered that, as the «cultural» upper class had been georgianised, the non-cultured (although the majority) should follow the cultured and that there should take place their assimilation to the Georgians. This, though, he says, is not the view of Lenin and Stalin. After this I. Zhvania continues: «Georgia's civilised world in the personage of Profs. Dzhavakhishvili, Akhvlediani, Beridze and others affirms that contemporary Mingrelia must be abandoned to the perspective of the future, since Georgian culture is the higher culture» (obviously these words are falsified -- Zviad Gamsakhurdia).

'The culture-phobe and vulgar marxist, I. Zhvania, obviously does not agree with this opinion. For him culture is some kind of growth, a hindrance «in the socialist

transformation of the countryside», and for this reason he prefers Mingrelia to remain in the mire of darkness and lack of culture, only let it not be «georgianised»; he prefers the darkness of a peasant's wattle-dwelling to the culture of the palace of the Dadianis [Mingrelia's princely family -- G.H.], because it helps him in the realisation of his own dark designs, in the declaration of the Mingrelians as a separate nationality.

'Later he laments that under the influence of these «bourgeois-chauvinist» professors Georgia's Ministry of Education abolished teaching in Mingrelian in the schools in 1921[16], by which move it deviated from the path of Lenin's and Stalin's doctrine.

'In August 1925 the «Mingrelian Question» again raised its head. At a meeting of the presidium of the Central Committee of Georgia's Communist Party a special commission was appointed. But, apparently, in the words of I. Zhvania, there was a rebellion this same year among the «reactionary», aristocratic, so-called «Mingrelian» intelligentsia, resident for decades in Tbilisi, who apparently no longer had any contact with the Mingrelian countryside and Mingrelian peasants, apart from the fact that for centuries they sucked the blood of the Mingrelian peasants. Here, in I. Zhvania's words, are these Georgian «fascists»: K'ots'ia [K'onst'ant'ine] Gamsakhurdia, Zhordania, Tedo Sakhok'ia and others, who gathered in the city of Tbilisi in the Rustaveli Theatre before any decision was taken by the Central Committee, and this «black aristocratic band condemns the Mingrelian question as the precursor of the division and splitting up of Georgia. Before the citizens in Tbilisi is declared a political and moral terror against those who dare to raise their voice in connection with the autonomy of Mingrelia».

'Later I. Zhvania continues: «The fascists enumerated above went so far as to declare as reactionaries those working-class Mingrelians who conceived a desire for schools, law-courts, newspapers and the conducting of business in village-soviets in their native language, and to have expelled from the Party those Party-member peasants who supported this proposal. In this way the collective view was shaped. This view was supported especially by Georgian Bolshevik deviationists one of whom, A. Ghambarashvili, according to I. Zhvania, did great harm to Mingrelian separatism».'

Clearly there was a heated discussion in the 1920s. If Zhvania is correctly reported by Gamsakhurdia (and Gamsakhurdia does not challenge the validity of this assertion), there was still a general movement in Mingrelia, albeit among the lower classes, in favour at the very least of widening the functions of Mingrelian. Whether talk of Mingrelian autonomy was equally widespread or whether this was proposed merely by Zhvania and other spokesmen of Mingrelian aspirations as a means to enhance their own political ambitions is unknown. But, stripping Zhvania's rhetoric of marxist vocabulary, we are surely justified in posing a reasonable question, namely: "Who knew what was in the best interests of the mass of Mingrelian peasants -- the Mingrelian peasants themselves or the Georgian-educated, Georgian-assimilated Mingrelian élite, largely resident in Tbilisi and ready as in 1902 and 1919 to join true Georgians in raising the immediate spectre of «separatism!»?' Zviad's father, K'onst'ant'ine,

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[16]If this statement is correct, it is the only occasion known to me where the teaching of Mingrelian in Mingrelia\s schools is acknowledged for any period in history.

whom many judge to be the greatest 20th century prose-writer in Georgian, was even roused to pen the following hyperbolic denunciation in response to the publication of a brochure 'Red Ray' in Mingrelian in the 20's 'Such an anti-Georgian event that spells doom for the Georgian language has not happened in Georgia for many a long year... The dark hand of Romanov Russia set out to reduce the bounds of the Georgian language and nation and to consign Georgian culture to eternal backwardness.' It would be fascinating to discover, as one day we may, exactly what discussion there was at the highest échalons of the Party in Tbilisi and Moscow, and who said what in connection with this Mingrelian Question. It would be particularly fascinating to discover Stalin's views, as already in 1913 in his *Marxism and the National Question* he had expressed himself on the subject of the Mingrelians (and others), where we note his inclination to assimilate peoples with no written literature (and thus endowed with only a 'primitive culture') to those who do possess writing and are thus truly deserving of the epithet 'cultured'. Here is a revealing section from pages 48-49 of an undated English translation of a collection of Stalin's articles and speeches published by Martin Lawrence Ltd.: 'But in the Caucasus there are a number of peoples each possessing a primitive culture, a specific language, but without its own literature; peoples, moreover, which are in a state of transition, partly becoming assimilated and partly continuing to develop. How is national cultural autonomy to be applied to them? What is to be done with such peoples? How are they to be «organised» into separate national cultural unions, such as are undoubtedly implied by national cultural autonomy? What is to be done with the Mingrelians, the Abkhasians, the Adjarians, the Svanetians, the Lesghians, and so on, who speak different languages but do not possess a literature of their own? To what nations are they to be attached? Can they be «organised» into national unions? Around what «cultural affairs» are they to be «organised»? What is to be done with the Ossets, of whom the Transcaucasian Ossets are becoming assimilated (but are as yet by no means wholly assimilated) by the Georgians[17]...?... The National problem in the Caucasus can be solved *only by drawing the backward nations and peoples into the common stream of a higher culture*' (original stress).

The upshot, however, is clear: there was no Mingrelian autonomy nor was Mingrelian officially awarded literary status. But, strangely, on the literary front some progressive steps were taken, for the 1st March 1930 saw the first edition of what became in 1932 a daily newspaper in Mingrelian (written with Georgian characters plus two extra), the *Q'ǝzaxšï Gazeti* 'Peasant's Paper', which, in the words of Joakim Enwall (*Some Remarks on the Language Debate in the Mingrelian Newspaper «Q'ǝzaxšï Gazeti»*, **Caucasian Perspectives**, ed. George Hewitt, 1992, 278-284): 'was intended to propagate the new ideology and information about the social development to the peasants of Mingrelia, who had little or no knowledge of Georgian' (p.280, stress added). Had all Mingrelians known Georgian (even then, let alone at the end of the last century, as we have seen to be always claimed), there would surely have been no need for this paper, which was the organ of the local committee of the Party, especially as Zhvania seems to have lost other aspects of his argument of the 1920s. The paper continued exclusively in Mingrelian until replaced on 1st January 1936 by *K'omunari* 'Man of the Commune', which was half in Mingrelian and half in

[17]This observation of 1913 gives the lie to the absurd charge oft-repeated by some Georgian nationalists, most notably by Zviad Gamsakhurdia, that the bulk of Ossetes appeared in Transcaucasia on |Georgian\ soil only in the wake of the establishment of Bolshevism in Georgia in 1921.

Georgian. This paper was published until 22nd July 1938, when Zugdidi came to be served by the wholly Georgian *Mebrdzoli* 'Warrior'. For the early years of the decade Enwall (1992:283) also reminds us that at least three full books were published in Mingrelian, namely: Zhvania's own *Muč'o kemende samargalxi muxande q'azaqiba sabč'oebi xelmdzġvanelen* 'How the Working Peasantry of Mingrelia Fought for Soviet Power' (1931, Zugdidi, 190pp.); *K'olekt'iv xanda, anbani samargalxi šk'olebis'o* 'Collective Work, Reader for the Schools of Mingrelia' (1932, Tbilisi, 198pp.); K. Marx & F. Engels *Manipest' k'omunist'eb p'art'ia* 'Manifesto of the Communist Party' (1933, Zugdidi). It is important to bear in mind that these books were designed for ordinary Mingrelians to read for information (and delight?).

The most prominent Mingrelian from 1931 was no longer I. Zhvania but Lavrent'i Beria (born in Merkheuli, a charming village just outside Sukhum in Abkhazia). It would appear that he did not exactly follow Zhvania in strenuously lobbying for Mingrelian linguistic, cultural and political rights, although Amy Knight in her biography (**Beria: Stalin's First Lieutenant**, Princeton University Press, 1993) has the following tantalising observation relating to events in 1932: 'He [Beria] then recounted his views on the question of redistricting in Mingrelia, recommending that one district, where people who knew only the Mingrelian language lived, be enlarged and that the Mingrelian language be introduced in the courts and schools there -- quite a concession to the interests of a national minority group' (p.49). According to Gamsakhurdia, Zhvania was liquidated while Beria was still in charge of Georgia in 1937[18], though the Georgian Encyclopædia states that Zhvania died in 1946. Gamsakhurdia in 1989 was directing much of his demagoguic venom against the Abkhazians and was fond of exhorting his supporters in Mingrelia to remind the Abkhazians of the fate of their cousins, the Ubykhs, by which he meant that, since it was by Tsarist Russia that this nation was forced out of their Caucasian homeland to settle in Turkey in 1864, the Abkhazians would better protect their future by throwing in their lot with those who aspired to an independent Georgia than by looking to the Kremlin for support. In fact, once the Ubykhs settled in Turkey their leaders, according the most prominent investigator of Ubykh, Georges Dumézil, took a conscious decision that, in addition to Turkish, it was more important they teach their children the language(s) of their relatives and (even in exile still) more numerous neighbours (viz. Circassian or, less commonly, Abkhaz) than their own Ubykh, the result being that the language became extinct with the death of the last speaker, Tevfik Esenç, in October 1992. Perhaps it was rather the Mingrelians who should have been (and still be) reminded of the fate of the Ubykhs, insofar as a language is here vividly demonstrated to be ultimately fatally wounded if it not only lacks the support but attracts the actual antagonism of its own leading lights, such as Tedo Zhordania, Tedo Sakhok'ia, and both the elder and younger Gamsakhurdias...

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[18]Beria went to Moscow in 1938 to take over from the doomed dwarf Yezhov as head of the Sevret Police (NKVD). Though his successor as Georgian Party Boss was the Svan K\andid Chark\viani, who served until replaced by the Georgian Ak\ak\i Mgeladze in 1952, Beriaite Mingrelians held prominent Party-posts. Most of these place-men and many ordinary Mingrelians were repressed in the rather mysterious *Mingrelian Affair* of 1951-52. When Germane Patsatsia dared to publish a two-part article about this Affair in the Tbilisi weekly *National Education* (published first in Georgian and later in the week in Russian translation) in July 1989, after the appearance of part one he reportedly received 67 anonymous threats by telephone.

After the temporary successes of the early 'thirties all was lost. In 1941 the Mingrelian ethnographer, Sergi Mak'alatia, published in Georgian in Tbilisi *The History and Ethnography of Mingrelia*. At the start of the ethnographic section on pages 180-181 we read: "The Mingrelian language, as is well-known, belongs to the group of Kartvelian languages, and the Mingrelians' native and literary language is Georgian, which has facilitated the advancement of the socio-cultural life of Mingrelia. Agents of autocratic Russia, as amongst others was Levitski, the famous author of the «dumb» method, fought against the Georgian language in Mingrelia and tried to drive this language out of Mingrelia's schools. They would asseverate that Mingrelians are not Georgians and that they have their own language. With the aim of russianising the Mingrelians Levitski and his group tried to create for the Mingrelians their own writing-system and to turn the population from Mingrelian to the Russian language. These politics of russianisation greatly hindered the business of learning and education in Mingrelia. The population began to forget the Georgian language; Mingrelia's leading intelligentsia was cut off from Georgian culture and began to travel down the path towards degeneration. But October's great revolution annihilated the evil intentions of the agents of tsarism, and today Mingrelia's population is given complete freedom to receive learning and education in its native Georgian language."

Clearly Mak'alatia is to be numbered along with Zhordania, Sakhok'ia, and the two Gamsakhurdias as a Mingrelian prepared only to fight in defence of the rights of Georgian language and culture in Mingrelia. Unfortunately he presents a rather lame case. This quotation starts with an illogicality -- if Mingrelian is a language, as Mak'alatia does at least acknowledge, whose native language can it be, if the Mingrelians have Georgian as their native language? Are we really meant to believe that Mingrelian children were able in the late 1930s to speak Georgian before they started school? We shall adduce evidence below that such is not even the case today. If Levitski was fighting against the use of Georgian in Mingrelia by encouraging the use of Mingrelian, then surely the aim would have been to entice the Mingrelians from Georgian (rather than Mingrelian) to Russian, as indeed Mak'alatia implies when he then says that at the time Mingrelians began to forget Georgian (not Mingrelian)? Communism is stated as the saviour of the Mingrelians by overturning attempts to introduce a writing-system for the Mingrelians, and yet there is no mention of the native Mingrelian publications listed in earlier paragraphs, which were produced under this self-same communist regime[19]. Anyone who has worked for any length of time on any non-Russian language of the former USSR will be familiar with ritualistic statements in philological works about the beneficial effects of the 'advanced' Russian language on the (by implication less advanced) non-Russian tongue concerned; such statements were designed to help counter possible resentment at the encroachment of Russian and today are quite rightly condemned as meaningless verbiage imposed from The Centre (or at least designed to placate The Centre). Mak'alatia was manifestly merely performing the same service on behalf of the encroachment of the 'advanced' Georgian language into the thus implicitly 'backward' Mingrelia. It is sad that such a defence of the foreign Georgian language seems always to be accompanied by explicit or implicit deprecation of Mingrelian and its associated cultural heritage (in this instance

[19]Is this loss of permission to publish papers and books in Mingrelian *circa* 1933 what Boeder had in mind when he spoke of |Stalinist repression\= Since it can normally be assumed that those who condemn Stalin\s excesses would prefer the pre-excess state of affairs to have continued, perhaps Boeder is really in favour of publishing in Mingrelian after all.

the writer's very own native language and culture) -- being cut off from the Georgian cultural milieu, the argument goes, Mingrelian intellectuals will be faced with nothing but degeneration[20].

And so we arrive at the situation as it obtains today. No self-respecting linguist (even in Georgia) would any longer be heard describing Mingrelian as a Georgian dialect, though this assessment of its status is still common amongst non-linguists in Georgia. Foreigners in Georgia are often told by otherwise apparently rational people that a Georgian only needs to spend half an hour in a Mingrelian-speaking environment to be able to understand virtually everything that is being said in this language. This is utter fantasy, and one cannot help wondering what possible motive must lie behind it. Already put on my guard by the number of ordinary people in Tbilisi prepared in 1975-76 to repeat the above-two mantras, I began to muse from the mid-1970s onwards over how the native Mingrelian linguists I either knew personally or knew of always seemed to specialise in a language other than their native one. The following examples come to mind: Mak'ar Khubua (Specialist in Persian), Arnold Chikobava (General Linguist, General Caucasologist, author of a grammar of Daghestanian Avar), Giorgi Rogava (Specialist in North West Caucasian Circassian), Varlam Topuria (Specialist in Svan), T'ogo Gudava (Specialist in Daghestanian languages, particularly of the Andi sub-group), Guram Topuria (Specialist in Daghestanian Lezgian), Vazha Shengelia (Specialist in Circassian), Levan Ghvindzhilia (Specialist in Daghestanian Dargwa), Merab Chukhua (Specialist in North Central Caucasian Chechen), Guram K'art'ozia (Specialist in Laz), Ant'on K'iziria (Specialist in Old Georgian/Kartvelian syntax), K'orneli Danelia (Specialist in Old Georgian), Mirian Tsik'olia (Specialist in Abkhaz), Revaz Ch'ant'uria (Specialist in Basque). Indeed, the only Mingrelian linguist I have ever met (or heard of) at the Institute of Linguistics in Tbilisi specialising in his native tongue is Revaz Sherozia, with whom I worked in 1987. In connection with Khubua, who published in 1937 a now very rare book of (untranslated) Mingrelian prose-texts, his entry in the Georgian Encyclopædia omits all reference to this important work when listing his publications -- only his Persian studies merit a mention. Over the years I asked a number of individuals whether there was (or had at some time been) an official policy if not to prohibit Mingrelians outright from researching into their native language then at least to discourage them from so doing. My query was always dismissed as preposterous -- until 1987 that is, when one individual finally admitted my suspicions to have a basis in reality. I revealed this fact in my short talk at the inaugural Georgian Studies' Day at SOAS (London University) in 1988, but I was not prepared at that time to identify the source, as he was still alive, and I did not want to put him in an embarrassing position. The individual has since died, so that I can now name him as Prof. Sargis Tsaishvili, who was himself half-Mingrelian and at the time was Deputy-Director of the Rustaveli Institute of Georgian Literature in Tbilisi, where he became Director prior to his death.

Boeder is, of course, correct when he says that there have been both Mingrelian and (especially) Svan publications over the years that have not been

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[20]Georgians regularly use the past participle from the verb *gadagvareba* |degenerate\ (viz. *gadagvarebuli* |degenerated\) to describe ethnic Georgians who do not speak Georgian (if, for example, they have been raised outside Georgia).

samizdat[21]. For Mingrelian one can list: K'. Samushia's three volumes *Examples of Georgian (Mingrelian) Folk Poetry* (1971), *Questions of Georgian Folk Poetry: Mingrelian Examples* (1979), *Georgian Oral Literature: Mingrelian Examples* (1990), O. Chidzhavadze's *Georgian Folk Songs -- Mingrelian* (1974), T'. Gudava's (with the unacknowledged for legal reasons A. Tsanava) *Georgian Folk Literature: Mingrelian Texts 1 -- Poetry* (1975), and K'. Danelia & A. Tsanava's *Georgian Folk Literature: Mingrelian Texts 2 -- Prose* (1991); to these could be added some of Tsanava's folklore-investigations, which have regularly used Mingrelian illustrative material. We note immediately in all these titles that Mingrelian always holds a subordinate position vis-à-vis Georgian. However, Boeder's conclusion, namely that the existence of such publications of itself refutes the hypothesis that Mingrelian (and Svan) might be suffering repression, cannot be allowed to pass unchallenged. Enwall made the crucial observation on pages 283-284 of his 1992 paper when he contrasted the purpose for which the three Mingrelian books from the early 1930s were published (to wit, dissemination among, and use by, native Mingrelians themselves) with the purpose for which publications post-1930s have been designed (to wit, use exclusively by academic specialists, whether linguists or ethnographers, rather than by ordinary Mingrelians). Would Boeder wish to argue that the Georgian Orthodox Church was not repressed during the Soviet era solely on the basis that A. Shanidze was able in 1945 to publish the Old Georgian Gospels according to three manuscripts from Shat'berd or that Ivane Imnaishvili was able to publish in 1979 a critical edition of the two final recensions of the Old Georgian Gospels? I suspect not. These academic volumes appeared even as the repression of the Church continued. And Boeder offers no explanation for why K'ak'a Zhvania's translation into Mingrelian verse of Georgia's national epic Shota Rust(a)veli's *Man in the Panther's Skin* was denied permission for official publication in 1966 at the very moment when the whole of Georgia was preparing to host an international celebration for the 800th anniversary of Rust(a)veli's birth. Under normal circumstances any new translation of this work, whatever its quality, would have been publicised with much ado across the entire Georgian media. Zhvania, who had apparently devoted many years to his translation, was left with no alternative other than to circulate copies prepared by xerox at his own expense (viz. *samizdat* -- my own copy's title-page is dated 1983). Would any objective observer deem this to be reasonable (let alone exemplary) treatment of an ordinary Mingrelian citizen and his life's work? Is not this curt rejection somewhat more indicative of the official attitude in Tbilisi to Mingrelian language and culture than the allowing of an occasional academic work into print? Specifically what harm would have been done by sanctioning publication in 1966? A slightly edited variant has now been professionally published in Tbilisi (after Zhvania's death) by a private coöperative, an official censor's approval no longer being necessary[22]. Another translation into Mingrelian by Gedevan Shanava was published in 1991 in Sukhum at the behest of the Abkhazian authorities.

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[21]The six collections of Svan material to which he alludes are no doubt the following> the four volumes of **Svan Prose Texts** in the order Upper Bal (1939), Lower Bal (1957), Lent\ex (1967), and Lashkh (1979) plus the **Svan Prose Chrestomathy** which appeared as volume 21 of the **Works of the Old Georgian Faculty** in 1978. None of the above contained any translations, whereas A. Shanidze\s 1939 collection of **Svan Poetry** and Davitiani\s 1974 **Svan Proverbs** were provided with Georgian translations.

[22]The title-page of the volume in my possession carries the date 1986.

Boeder again is fully correct when he says that materials for a Mingrelian dictionary exist in file-card format in the Georgian Academy. When I was reading Mingrelian texts with Sherozia and Chukhua in Tbilisi in 1987, we sat for the purpose in an unused room in the Linguistics' Institute. I was somewhat surprised to find that the only item in the room other than the table and chairs was this collection of file-cards containing Mingrelian lexical data -- tied in bundles, the cards were just left lying, unprotected, on the floor! I believe no-one had (has?) any plans actively to work on this invaluable collection. And since Boeder sees fit to mention it, why has Kaldani's Svan-Georgian Dictionary been languishing 'in press' **for years**? This longed-for volume should have appeared almost 20 years ago. When one considers the titles of some of the linguistic works this Institute has produced over the last two decades, one begins to wonder if there might not be ulterior motives for this delay. Since the linguists in Tbilisi manifestly give no priority to preparation of a Mingrelian dictionary, one might have expected that strong encouragement would have been offered to the private efforts in this direction of the director of the local museum in Mart'vili, Givi Eliava. However, Enwall relates (1992:283) how Eliava's original intention to produce a Mingrelian-Georgian dictionary that would have served ordinary Mingrelians was evidently frowned upon by Ak'ak'i Shanidze, and that the compiler's intention to include both Mart'vilian and Zugdidian variants was rejected both by Shanidze and his successor as editor, K'orneli Danelia, both of whom insisted that the only dialect to be represented should be that of Zugdidi, which would render the work (they evidently thought) more appropriate to use only by linguists. The enterprise was started in 1975 and has still to see the light of day, partly, one suspects, precisely because of the difficulties put in Eliava's way by the Tbilisi editors.

Of course one has to agree with Boeder (and others who charge that Feurstein neglects the wishes of the Mingrelians) that it is upto the Mingrelians themselves to decide that they want and then to request teaching of (possibly in), as well as literature in, their native tongue. And I am sure that Feurstein would agree wholeheartedly with this assertion; his point about the lexical wealth of Mingrelian was probably more a defence against the traditional downplaying of the importance of Mingrelian by referring to it as an undeveloped dialect, substantial evidence for which dismissive attitude we have adduced above. But have we not also given sufficient evidence of the sort of hysterical reaction that any call for just such language-rights arouses amongst both true Georgians and the Georgian-assimilated Mingrelian élite? When Western supporters of the pan-Georgian doctrine tell us that Mingrelians (and Svans) are quite happy to regard themselves as Georgians, they totally disregard the context in which this identity has been imposed on these Kartvelian peoples since some time around/after 1930. And it needs to be stressed in this connection that the fourth Kartvelian people, the Laz, who almost exclusively live in Turkey, are in no way subject to this artificially manufactured inability to distinguish between ethnic categories, regarding themselves, on the one hand, as Laz and their fellow-Kartvelian, Georgian-speaking Imerkhevians, on the other hand, as Georgians. We saw above that in 1926 Mingrelians and Svans were perfectly free to style themselves as Mingrelians or Svans in the census of that year and did so -- things had altered by the time of the next (and subsequent) Soviet censuses. My one-time main informant for Mingrelian was born in 1930 and had to be registered that year as a Georgian, whereas his elder brother, born in the late 1920s, was registered as a Mingrelian. Mingrelians and Svans have been almost universally educated since the 1920s through the medium of Georgian, and it has

there and elsewhere been drilled into them ever since that they are Georgians. When you have no alternative but to regard yourself as a Georgian under Stalin himself (post-1930 to 1953) or the essentially Stalinist system (1953-1991), it is little wonder that, when asked in Georgian: *tkven romeli khart'velebi khart'veli tu megrel?* "Which are you -- Georgian or Mingrelian?", the answer given is the one inculcated for 60 years, namely: *khart'veli var* 'I am Georgian'. It has been suggested to me by a Mingrelian-speaker who is not, however, Mingrelian that, if you posed the same question in Mingrelian: *tkva ramu ǯ̌ut -- kurtu vari margali?* you would be much more likely to be told: *margali vorek* 'I am Mingrelian', as to call a Mingrelian a *kurtu* 'Georgian' is to insult him! Manifestly there is scope here for a professionally conducted sociolinguistic investigation by some intrepid investigator. It may be that in the final analysis a real component of modern Mingrelian (or Svan) identity will turn out to be a fusion of *megrelobа* 'mingrelianness' (or *svanobа* 'svanness') with *khart'velobа* 'georgianness', as Boeder suggests, in which case neither I nor anyone else would be justified in raising an objection. But, even if, for the sake of argument, we allow this duality to be a fact, what relevance does it have to the problem of the preservation of the Mingrelian (and Svan) language(s)? Is a fusion of *megrelobа* and *khart'velobа* of itself going to safeguard Mingrelian and Svan? -- of course not. Or simply because *khart'velobа* may play a part in how Mingrelians and Svans today see themselves, is this sufficient justification for outside observers to sit on their hands and button their lips, while watching these languages die?

The sustained attempt to impress Georgianness on Mingrelians (and Svans) coupled with the deliberate neglect, not to say denigration, of their native language(s) not unnaturally leads to such self-deprecation (or linguistic insecurity) as illustrated by the comment in 1982 of my then-informant's elderly mother: "Why does this Englishman want to learn our language when it does even us Mingrelians no good?" But inspite of the history of Georgian hostility towards Mingrelian (and Svan) which we have catalogued for earlier decades, readers may well enquire whether attitudes might not have mellowed in Georgia over recent years? Regrettably not. In 1989-1990 we had three examples of ethnic Mingrelians who chose to speak out publicly, making a general call for recognition of their native language and culture. They were: Mrs. T. Bok'uchava-Gagulia in the weekly *Literary Georgia* (28 April, 1989), Vano Dgebuadze in the twice weekly *Ezro* (16 Sept, 1989), and Nugzar Dzhodzhua in both *Ezro* (4 July, 1989) and the monthly *Ednieba* (July 1990). Mrs. T. Bok'uchava-Gagulia described in her article how Georgians in Tbilisi were wont to turn their backs on her when they discovered she could not speak Georgian. Her admitted ignorance of Georgian became the target of the attacks she subsequently suffered in *Literary Georgia*, where she was lambasted for being no real Georgian if she could not speak the language -- her verbal assailants quite missed the point that she is Mingrelian, not Georgian, and gave her no credit for being able to speak Mingrelian! Mr. Dgebuadze described how at school the bright member of his family was re-registered with the Georgian form of the family's surname (namely Dgebuadze) whereas the less bright was left to carry the Mingrelian original (namely Dgebua). For his pains the charge was laid against him again in *Literary Georgia* that he had falsified his war-record (the implication being that, assuming the charge of untrustworthiness to be true, why should readers believe what he was claiming about his experience of anti-Mingrelian behaviour). Nugzar Dzhodzhua not only published his views in the press but went on television in Abkhazia to speak up in defence of the rights of Mingrelian and Mingrelians (almost all the so-called 'Georgian' population of

Abkhazia prior to the recent war was made up of ethnic Mingrelians). In his case the assaults were not just of a verbal nature: he was beaten up after this TV-appearance; he was sacked from his job; his mother was visited by certain individuals who persuaded her to write an article for a Georgian newspaper in which she publicly disowned her son. When Dzhodzhua acceded to the urgings of friends to stand for election as a deputy to the Abkhazian Parliament in 1991, his candidature attracted the attention of members of the KGB, and armed representatives of this organisation visited Dzhodzhua's house to try (unsuccessfully) to 'persuade' him to withdraw. In Sukhum in 1992 he shewed me an article he had written calling for an end to Georgian anti-Mingrelian discrimination which had been turned down for publication by editors in both Mingrelia and even Abkhazia as being too explosive a piece for inclusion in any local paper or journal. I brought his manuscript to England, translated it and included it as Appendix 3 in my article *Abkhazia: a problem of identity and ownership* (**Central Asian Survey**, 12.3, 267-323, 1993). If Mingrelians were free to raise the question of their language being given official support and to conduct an open, rational debate, as Boeder implies when he states that there is no linguistic repression of Mingelian, would there be any need for such self-censorship, not to say fear? Lest anyone be still in any doubt that the traditional Georgian attitudes towards Mingrelian are as strong today as ever, let us listen to the words of this contemporary witness: "Why are we *so-called* Mingrelians? Or why are we «so-called» Mingrelians *dogs*? Does it follow then that our language is *the language of dogs*?... *Gruzija/Gruzin* are artificially created collective terms designed to incorporate Mingrelians, Svans and Georgians. That is to say that these three peoples have created a single *Gruzin* people, and their common homeland has been styled *Gruzija*. The terms *sakartvelo/kartveli*, on the other hand, are not collective terms, since they do not include Mingrelians and Svans. It follows that *Gruzija/Gruzin* and *sakartvelo/kartveli* are pairs of words with totally different senses. If we were to substitute for *sakartvelo/kartveli* the pair *samegrelo/megreli* ['Mingrelia/Mingrelian' in Georgian] or *svaneti/svani* ['Svanetia/Svan' in Georgian], both of these pairs would be equally incorrectly translated into Russian by *Gruzija/Gruzin*. You will surely respond to me by pointing out that the Mingrelians have no literature. But you should understand that having a writing-system is not a defining characteristic of an ethnic group; a writing-system is simply the means of expressing a language's system of sounds... In his critical article *Comrade Bregadze, Brother Dolashvili* (**Literary Georgia 7** 16 February 1990) T. Ts'ivts'ivadze writes: «Unfortunately for me it seems that my pen ran away with itself when I wrote the lines: 'Some children reared in the villages of Mingrelia master Georgian somewhat late'.» With the exception that the word *some* needs to by replaced by either *most* or even *all*, Ts'ivts'ivadze is of course quite right, for, <u>if a Mingrelian child did not learn Georgian at school, he would not know it at all, since the native language of Mingrelian children is Mingrelian</u>... No historian, linguist, philologist, or any other specialist could prove that Mingrelians are Georgians. The Mingrelians were compelled to view themselves as Georgians, and this is why the issue of Mingrelia and the Mingrelians, which has been so sensitive for so many years, will sooner or later «explode», and the longer it takes, the more bitter and savage will be the result' (underlining added). Dzhodzhua's article in *Edhemie* illustrates the classic progression from the linguistic inequality heaped on Mingrelian that we have been highlighting through to linguistic prejudice, which in turn leads to social inequality suffered by Mingrelians, who are regarded as country-bumpkins and as such are the butt of many a joke, the quip "What are

you? A Mingrelian or something?' being a common put-down in eastern Georgia, as Dzhodzhua himself noted in an earlier article.

Surely the situation must be crystal-clear by now. Mingrelians in the mass within Mingrelia speak Mingrelian and only learn Georgian when they go to school, which is where they are indoctrinated with the idea of their 'Georgianness'. I do not know where in Mingrelia Boeder has spent time observing the linguistic habits of Mingrelians to enable him to regard the judgment from the Tbilisi Institute of Linguistics whereby Mingrelian is styled a 'sociolinguistic dialect' as «close to reality and fully correct». Any such observations on his part do not accord with mine. In my experience on the western fringes of the Mingrelian-speaking area (specifically in Ochamchira and Sukhum), it is simply not true that Mingrelian is only used at home or when shopping. I have spent many hours in the Ochamchira passport-office or at the Interior Ministry in Sukhum (not to mention time spent with Mingrelians at home or on public transport), and I can report that Mingrelians regularly conduct all their official business in these establishments in Mingrelian -- failing this, Russian is used. Certainly they do not write Mingrelian, but for all other purposes Mingrelian is their regular language for all spheres of activity. Those who seek to reprimand Feurstein and myself for meddling in others' affairs and not being satisfied with letting the Mingrelians (and the Svans) decide for themselves conveniently forget what happens to those Mingrelians who do dare to raise their heads above the parapet in order to try to initiate a debate -- it is (metaphorically, and in the post-Gamsakhurdia conditions prevailing in Mingrelia perhaps not merely metaphorically) shot off. Is this to be judged 'letting the Mingrelians speak for themselves'? Is it not reasonable for interested and concerned Western linguists to suggest to colleagues (whether Georgian, Mingrelian or Svan) that untaught, non-literary languages are in danger of ultimate extinction in the conditions prevailing at the end of the 20th century and to try to encourage a calm and rational debate as to how their viability can be best safeguarded? The complacency revealed in the introduction to Danelia/Tsanava's 1991 collection of Mingrelian prose-texts is simply staggering: 'No-one can define exactly how the fate of the unwritten Kartvelian languages -- Svan and Mingrelo-Laz -- will unfold after a few centuries, but one certainly can say that the materials fixed in these languages will in the future be invested with the value of gold.' Does it not occur to the two compilers that there is still time to ensure that future researchers will continue to have access to native speakers of living languages, if action is taken NOW? And who better to promote the need for that action than two such educated Mingrelian scholars (albeit resident in Tbilisi) as the Old Georgian specialist K'orneli Danelia and the folklorist Ap'olon Tsanava? And if they cannot recognise the need themselves, is there not a valuable role for their Western colleagues in placing the problem within the scope of their and others' vision?

I wish finally to offer my own recommendation in this matter. At the end of the 20th century many non-specialists, well aware of the threat of extinction that hangs over many animal- and plant-species, are prepared to make forceful representation for the purpose of preserving our common heritage (viz. the natural environment). Given this interest in the living-world, it is suprising how little attention is paid to the disappearance (both actual as well as potential) of something so peculiarly human as a language, and with it the culture that it embodies -- I am assuming that no-one still subscribes to the Stalinist view that lack of a written literature presupposes only 'primitive' culture. But then perhaps

this is not so surprising after all, for how is the man-in-the-street to know of the dangers when specialists in the language(s) concerned (who may even be native speakers of the very language(s)) adopt such a complacent attitude to their possible extinction? It is my firm conviction that this attitude does nobody any credit and certainly brings no benefit to the language(s), which in the final analysis is that with which one would have hoped the relevant specialists would be most concerned. Perhaps one takes a different view of these matters when one has met the last speaker of a language, such that the question is no longer of purely academic relevance. And in this regard I feel myself to have been immensely privileged to have met and worked with Tevfik Esenç in 1974; ever since I have remained unshaken in the belief that it behoves all of us with an interest in the languages of the Caucasus to do all we can to prevent any of the rest suffering the same fate as Ubykh, whether by language-death through accidental or deliberate neglect or by the threat of physical annihilation, by no means an unreal possibility, as recent events have shewn.

Georgia is now recognised as an independent state, albeit re-linked to Moscow through its entry into the CIS. As to its political future, specifically as regards the status of Mingrelia and Svanetia, it is for local peoples to decide. Had reason and a spirit of generosity prevailed as Soviet order waned, it might have been feasible to construct a viable federal structure that would have peacefully kept Abkhazia and South Ossetia within the orbit of Tbilisi and avoided the unnecessary bloodshed that Gamsakhurdia stoked and personally fanned in South Ossetia, with his successor pursuing similarly short-sighted and tragic policies in Abkhazia. Both these provinces are *de facto* lost to Tbilisi, and my <u>own</u> suggestion for what remains of the country would be the creation of a new federation with at least the following units: Eastern Georgia, Western Georgia, Ach'ara, Mingrelia, Svanetia, an Azerbaijani Region in the south, and an Armenian Region in the south-west[23]. If and when political stability can be re-established, a new Language Programme must be promptly introduced[24] that recognises and makes adequate provision for the teaching of a number of languages. Georgian would naturally hold pre-eminent position as the *lingua franca* of the Georgian Republic. Equal in status in the Armenian-speaking area would be Armenian, and Armenians living compactly elsewhere (e.g. Tbilisi) would also have the right to have their language taught at the same level of intensity; in the Azerbaijani area the same would apply to Azeri. Provision for the teaching of Russian would depend on whether ethnic Russians remained living compactly anywhere in independent Georgia, in which case it should have equal status with Georgian; otherwise it could be taught as a foreign language, if this were felt to be desirable. The situation in these cases would not differ vastly from that which obtained in the Soviet period, when Georgian-, Russian-, Armenian- and Azeri-language schools existed either throughout or in selected areas of Georgia. However, my main departure from historical precedent would be the introduction of the teaching of, and tuition in, Mingrelian, Svan and even North Central

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[23]Shortly before his death Gamsakhurdia gave an interview to **The Times** in which he spoke about the need for a federal structure for Georgia. And now Interfax has reported (5 Feb 1994) that Georgia\s constitutional commission has worked out a draft for a new political and territorial system for the country. It evidently provides for dividing Georgia into 12 territories, Abkhazia and Adzharia among them, though with special political status. No provision at all seems to have been made for S. Ossetia.

[24]The 1989 State Programme for the Georgian Language, the draft of which was published in November 1988, was an affront to the speakers of all the languages other than Georgian spoken within Georgia, for the needs of not a single one of them were even mentioned (let alone catered for) in this document.

Caucasian Bats in the sole village where this severly endangered language is still spoken (viz. Zemo Alvani in K'akhetia). The Georgian alphabet would serve as the basis for all three languages, and, as we have remarked already, a mere two extra characters are required for Mingrelian (and these are already available in at least the Metsniereba Printing House in Tbilisi). Given the lack of teaching personnel, materials and experience, the same range and standards could hardly be achieved for Mingrelian, Svan and Bats as for Armenian, Azeri and Russian in Georgia. But this is no reason why a start could not be made in kindergartens and at primary schools in the respective regions. Aid could very likely be sought for the preparation of teaching materials and the training of personnel from sources such as UNESCO and the Soros Foundation.

Of course, none of this will happen without the value of it becoming clear to both the central authorities in Tbilisi and the Mingrelians, Svans and Bats themselves. And here is where the friends of Georgia (and even the **Friends of Georgia**, the recently formed association of Western governments and their various representatives) could play a positive role for once. The Georgians (proper) have to be persuaded to appreciate that encouraging a regional language will not inevitably lead to the secession of that region from the Georgian state, as seems to be their constant dread; on the contrary, this is much more likely to happen as a result of repression and the sort of physical bullying to which Mingrelia has been subjected since January 1992 by Dhzaba Ioseliani and his Mkhedrioni fighters[25]. They must be helped to understand that it is in their own best interests to shew respect to, and take pride in, their country's regional diversity (in all its manifestations, including the linguistic variety). Respect shewn to a country's ethnic minorities (even fellow-Kartvelians) is likely to be repaid by greater long-term loyalty on the part of the minorities to the ideals of the country's majority. Equally, after decades of having their linguistic, cultural and even personal worth disparaged, it may well take time for many Mingrelians and Svans themselves to be persuaded that giving them the opportunity to study (and study in) their native language is not a Moscow-inspired sinister plot to cut them adrift from political, cultural and financial advantage (though to speak of financial advantage to anyone at the moment in Georgia is something of an oxymoron); after all, was not Zhordania arguing a century ago that the introduction of schooling in Mingrelian would lead to permanent backwardness for this region, cut off from the glories of its native[!] Georgian culture? Surely it should be plain for all to see, that, if Mingrelian and Svan are given equal status to Georgian in these two provinces, far from being cut off from the cultural heritage of the Georgian-speaking world, they could both continue to derive benefit and joy from that heritage, and simultaneously celebrate openly and widely their own oral heritage, while simultaneously participating in the exciting business of creating two new literary languages, which would in time assuredly produce a literature whose attractions cannot presently even be imagined. This would be an enrichment for all concerned -- Mingrelians, Svans, Georgians and even Western Kartvelologists; but once these languages disappear, they can never be recreated, and that would be a loss for all humanity.

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[25]It is fascinating to speculate whether the same sort of punishment would have been meted out by Shevardnadze\s deputy to Gamsakhurdia\s supporters in, say, K\akhetia, had Gamsakhurdia been a K\akhetian rather than a Mingrelian...

Just as the Abkhazians gave a lead in the debate about the post-Soviet political organisation of Georgia by proposing federal relations between Abkhazia and Georgia in June 1992, so they have now taken the forward-looking initiative of offering the teaching of Mingrelian to their Mingrelian citizens in the Gali district, the southernmost region of Abkhazia which borders Mingrelia. Predictably, this has not been at all well received in Tbilisi, as is clear from the following quotation from the BBC's **Summary of World Broadcasts** (SU/1975 F/3 for 19 April 1994): "The separatists [the Georgian term for the Abkhazians -- GH] interprete [sic -- GH]] the tragedy that took place in Gali rayon as a misunderstanding between the Abkhaz and the Mingrelians [an ethnic branch of the Georgian nation living in north-western Georgia in the territory adjacent to Abkhazia] and have appealed for the restoration of traditional ties of kinship between them. Besides, the Abkhaz promise to introduce the Mingrelian language [a dialect of the Georgian language] as a language of teaching in secondary schools and issue identification papers indicating Mingrelian as a distinct nationality. At present, refugees returning to Gali rayon are being issued so-called registration cards bearing the above reference to nationality.

"This aggressive activity of the Abkhaz separatists is apparently provoked by recent agreements on a peaceful settlement of the conflict and the return of refugees to their homes" (stresses added). Particular attention should be paid to the second square-bracketed exegesis offered by the BBC's Georgian monitor(s) for up-to-date evidence of the depth of penetration among average Georgians of the myth that Mingrelian is not a separate language.