

Preface

Though the author of this story, the late Daur Zantaria, did not state precisely when the events described in it took place, it is clear from references within the text that the year(s) concerned must have been around 1839-40; at appropriate places footnotes are inserted to give historical dates. Part of the chronology presented by historians O. Bghazhba and S. Lak(‘)oba in their 2007 ‘History of Abkhazia’ (in Russian) is adapted below to help readers understand something of the developments affecting Abkhazia during that period. For more information on Abkhazian history in the 19th century see Stanislav Lak‘oba’s article ‘History: 18th century-1917’ (pp. 67-88 in George Hewitt’s edited ‘The Abkhazians: a Handbook’, Curzon Press, 1999).

Once Tsarist Russia started to push southwards in search of warm-water ports, all the peoples of the Caucasus, including the Abkhazians and their close relatives, the Ubykhs and Circassians, were fated to have their destinies shaped by the eventual domination of that imperial power (subsequently in the guise of the Soviet Union). As a result of Russian intrigue and the connivance of Zafar (or Sefer or Aly) Bey (aka Georgi) Chachba, the illegitimate son of the murdered Abkhazian ruler Kelesh (or K‘alash) Bey Chachba (d. 2 May 1808), whose claim to power in Abkhazia between 1810 and 1821 rested on no legitimate basis, Abkhazia came under Tsarist Russian ‘protection’ on 17 February 1810, though internal governance supposedly in the hands of the local administration; between 1808 and 1810 Abkhazia had been ruled by Kelesh Bey’s first son, Aslan Bey (Aslambak‘) Chachba, who was rumoured (falsely in the view of Stanislav Lak(‘)oba) to have been responsible for his father’s murder. That same year saw the first wave of deportations of Abkhazians to Ottoman lands, which reflected the fact that the relationship with Russia was not universally welcomed (especially amongst such mountain-communities as those of Dal, Ts‘abal, Aibga, Ahchypsy, Psh^wy, as well as the Sadz Abkhazians, who were immediate neighbours to the Ubykhs, residents of the territory around today’s Sochi), and this led to turbulence across the region, particularly during the great Caucasian War of 1817-64. Throughout those years Russia faced sustained resistance from all the North Caucasian peoples, from the Black Sea to the Caspian. Following Russia’s victory on 21 May 1864, all the Ubykhs and most of both the Abkhazians and the Circassians were deported to various settlements in the Ottoman Empire (from Kosovo, through today’s Turkey, where all ethnic Ubykhs, now devoid of their native tongue, and the majority of both Abkhazians and Circassians currently reside, to Syria, Jordan and Israel).

The ruling princely family in Abkhazia carried the surname Chachba (Shervashidze or Sharvashidze in Georgian); the ruling family in (today’s West Georgian province of) Mingrelia, to the south-east of Abkhazia, were the Dadianis. From 14 February 1823 to June 1864 the (last) ruler of Abkhazia, referred to as ‘king’ in this story, was Mikhail Sharvashidze (or Shervashidze), second son of Kelesh Bey. Because of the long years of Turkish influence in the region, Turkish forms of names were frequently employed, and

for this reason the Abkhazian prince ('king') is here (with one exception) styled Ahmyt (aka Khamud) Bey.

Short Chronology

1821-23: Uprising in Abkhazia led by Aslan Bey Chachba

1821-28: Banishment to Siberia of Hasan Bey Chachba

1824-27: Popular uprisings in Abkhazia under Aslan Bey in protest against Tsarism's colonial policy

1830: Storming of the Russian fort in Gagra by the Ubykhs and Sadzians under the command of Hadzhi Berzek

1837: Expedition of Baron Rosen to Ts'abal (Ts[']ebelda)

1840: Punitive expedition of N. Murav'ev to Dal

1843: Punitive expedition to Pshwy with the ruler of Abkhazia at its head

1848: Mohamed Emin, representative from Sheikh Shamil, Avar leader of the North East Caucasian resistance against Russia, to the Sadzians, Ubykhs, and peoples of Dal and Ts'abal

1857 Summer: Storming of the Gagra fortress by the Ubykhs and Sadzian-Dzhigetians [The term 'Dzhigetians/Dzhikhs' is Russian for the Sadzians]

1859 January: Punitive expedition of Gen. M. T. Loris-Melikov to Psh^wy

1864: Expulsion to Ottoman lands of the Ubykhs, most Circassians, and most Abkhazians

1865 17 August: Mikhail Chachba permanently exiled to Voronezh (Russia)

1866 16 April: Death in Voronezh of Mikhail Chachba

Note on pronunciation

We have elected to represent proper names as closely as possible to the way they are presented in the text, rather than try to make them look more natural to English readers or to use forms that some readers might have met elsewhere — for example, in the Chronology the name Berzek appears, whereas in the text it is kept as Byrzyk^l.

The graph 'y' has the value of the vowel heard in the casual pronunciation of the conjunction 'that'. Linguistic practice would represent it by a schwa (ə), though anyone familiar with the Turkish script can think of it as equating to undotted /ı/, whilst in Russian it equates to Cyrillic ы.

The superscript graph 'j' following a consonant palatalises that consonant, whilst superscript 'w' in the same position labialises its preceding consonant. The toponym Psh^wy is thus to be broken down and pronounced as: p-s-h^w-y. The digraph /j^w/ is articulated like the initial sound of the French word *huit* '8'.

Men are sometimes called by a given name followed by a patronymic of the form /X-ipa/, where /-ipa/ is to be pronounced [jy-pa], meaning 'his-son'; this is the origin of the element *-ba* which ends most Abkhazian surnames (e.g. Chachba), though some still end

in *-ipa* (e.g. Inal-Ipa). Occasionally in the text we meet the female equivalent */-pha/* ‘daughter’, pronounced [p-ha] (NOT [fa]).

An apostrophe after a consonant means that the consonant is glottalised (i.e. pronounced with additional closure of the vocal cords, which adds a sharpness to the articulation of the basic consonant).

The sequence */kh/* is pronounced like the Scottish pronunciation of */ch/* in *Loch*. The ejective */qʼ/* is articulated against the soft palate, further back in the mouth than */k/*.

One sound we do not attempt to capture is the retroflex nature of the fricative at the start of the name ‘Shabat’.

Map

It seemed useful to append a map for the benefit of readers unfamiliar with the basic geography of Abkhazia and the historical tribal distribution. The map we have selected (see <https://gallery.circassianworld.com/#collection/3>) is reproduced by the kind permission of the cartographer Artur Tsutsiev.

Abkhazia’s modern capital Aq^wa (or Sukhum, as it is more widely known) lies on the coast beneath the letters ‘kh’ of ‘Abkhazia’. Lykhny was once the capital and is located somewhat inland north-west of Sukhum two-thirds on the way toward the R. Bzyp; the royal palace was torched by the Russians after the revolt of 1866 — in this story the site of the royal residence is said to be the village of Lahlar. The village of Aq’armara, desolated since the 1992-93 war with Georgia, is in the hills above the once-thriving mining town of T’q^w’archal in the south-east of the republic, not far from the left-turning bulge in the course of the R. Ingur. One can locate Ts’abal (here Tsebelda) and Dal, the river flowing past them being the K^w’ydry (K’odor) — Lata lies between Ts’abal and Dal, and Warda is roughly opposite Lata on the left bank of the K^w’ydry; the village named here as Sh^wyk^wran is today called Amtq^j’al and lies between Ts’abal and Lata; the Sadzians are represented as Sadzes, Aibga as Ahibga, Ahchypsy as Akhchipsow, and Psh^wy as Pskhu; the speakers of the Ashkharywa and T’ap’anta dialects of Abkhaz live on the northern side of the main Caucasian ridge in today’s Russian Federation, where they are collectively referred by the term Abaza. The home-territories of the Kartvelian Svans and Mingrelians are clearly indicated. On some old maps Dzhigetians (Dzhikhhs) will appear where the Sadzians are shewn below.

