

The Abkhazian Language and the Georgian Graphics

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The Abkhazian writing had not existed till the second half of the 19th century. The first Abkhazian words and phrases were written down by the Turkish traveler **Evlia Chelebi** in 1641. He used the Arabian graphics, which could not fully represent the rich phonemic system of the Abkhazian language. In 1846, the German Orientalist Georg Rosen published his work about the structure of the Ossetian language (in Berlin). The book included a short grammatical review of the Abkhazian, Megrelian and Svan speeches. The Ossetian, Abkhazian and Kartvelian linguistic materials were represented by means of the Georgian graphics (Mkhedruli). E. Cheleb's and G. Rosen's attempts of the usage of the Arabic and Georgian graphics for "presenting" the Abkhazian linguistic material cannot be considered as an attempt of the creation of the Abkhazian literary language. The authors did not have such an aim: E. Cheleb did not care about the creation of the exact transcription or writing. He wrote down the Abkhazian words and phrases for the satisfaction of his touristic curiosity. G. Rosen needed the Georgian graphics for scientific purposes, because he believed, that the phonemic system of the Abkhazian language could be presented by the Georgian alphabet. Hence, G. Rosen did not notice, that in the Abkhazian language the number of phonemes was two times more than in the Georgian language. Moreover, the scholar did not try to represent these specific phonemes.

The first scholar, who noticed specific Abkhazian phonemes and tried to create the Abkhazian writing was the Russian General **Peter Uslar**. In 1862, during the creation of the grammatical review of this language, he used the Russian graphics (Cyrillic) in addition to the "invented" letters (mainly, the modified Russian letters). **Therefore, P. Uslar's work can be regarded as the beginning of the history of the Abkhazian writing and literary language.**

In 1862 "The Society Restoring Orthodox Christianity in the Caucasus" established a committee for compiling **the first Abkhazian alphabetical text-book**. The committee worked under the leadership of the general Ivan Bartolomei. Its members were Georgian **Dimitri Purtseladze** and Russian **Vladimir Trigorov**. The committee was supported by Abkhazians: a priest **Ioane Gegia**, a praporshchik **Giorgi Kurtsikidze** and a nobleman **Simon Eshba**. The text of the compiled text-book was checked and corrected by **Hasan Marghania**, **Konstantine Sharvashidze** and **Grigol Sharvashidze**. The book was published in Tbilisi in 1865. The Abkhazian reading material was translated into the Russian and Georgian languages [The history... 1986: 12-13]. I. Bartolomei's committee decided to use the Georgian writing for presenting the Abkhazian linguistic material, but P. Uslar denounced it to the government. Therefore, I. Bartolomei was forced to use P. Uslar's writing, which was created on the basis of Cyrillic.

Since 1862 the graphical basics of the Abkhazian literary language have been changed several times. Acad. N. Marr's writing based on the Latin graphics was used in 1926-1928 and was replaced by N. Iakovlev's and E. Polivanov's Latinized graphics in 1928-1937. In 1938-1954 the Abkhazian language was transferred to the Georgian graphics, while in 1954 P. Uslar's "Cyrillized" writing was restored. The changes of the Abkhazian literary language were connected with the Tsarist Russia and with the linguistic policy of the USSR [Gvantseladze, 2011].

Pro-Moscow Abkhazian scientific, journalistic and political literature discussed the transference of the Abkhazian literary language to the Georgian graphics and accused Georgians in willfulness and in the attempt of the Abkhazian people's "Georgianization". The authors, who shared this idea (voluntarily or involuntarily) did not consider the genuine history and purpose of this action. Hence, the archival materials connected with this question make us to draw different conclusions. Later we will discuss these materials.

The protocols of special meetings, which were held on 4-5 December 1937 in Acad. N. Marr's Scientific-Research Institute of the Abkhazian Culture (in Sukhumi) were firstly kept in the private archive of the famous Georgian Academician Simon Janashia. Nowadays, they are

presented in the Georgian National Center of manuscripts (The first publication of the Russian texts of protocols and their Georgian translations. Gvantseladze, 2011: 455-486)

The protocols show, that a **special resolution about the transference of the Abkhazian literary language to the Georgian graphics was adopted by the 15th Party Conference of the Abkhazian Regional Organization of the Communist Party of Georgian in May of 1937**. The commission was created under the leadership of Prof. Petre Sharia - a head of the Department of Printed Word and Party Propaganda of the Central Committee of the Georgian Communist Party. The members of the conference were the representatives of the Abkhazian intelligentsia and party elite: a writer and a founder of the Abkhazian literature **Dimitri Gulia**, a director of Sukhumi State Pedagogical Institute **Andria Chochua**, a public commissar of education of the Abkhaz ASSR **Mikheil Delba**, a director of N. Marr Scientific Research Institute of the Abkhazian Culture **Arsenti Hashba**, a public commissar of education of the Abkhaz ASSR **Davit Chagava** (he was repressed in the second half of 1937. M. Dalba was appointed to his position) and a chairman of the High Council of the Abkhaz ASSR **Mushni Hashba**.

It's obvious, that the presence of this question in the agenda of the conference and the text of the resolution were agreed with Moscow. Otherwise, the "willfulness" of the Abkhazian and Georgian Soviet-party functionaries, scientists and writers had to be restrained during "the bloody" 1937.

On 4-5 December 1937 a special meeting was held in the Institute of the Abkhazian Culture (in Sukhumi). Its 33 participants were:

Abkhazians - a historian **Simon Basaria**, a linguist **Khukhuti Bghajba**, a party functionary **Nikoloz Geria**, a translator and a journalist **Mikheil Gochua**, a writer **Giorgi Gulia**, a writer **Dimitri Gulia**, a party functionary **Mikheil Delba**, a teacher **Bagrat Katsia**, **Nikoloz Kokoskeria**, **V. Maani**, **V. Nakopia**, a teacher **Nikoloz Pateopha**, a linguist and a historian **Giorgi Shakirbai**, a linguist **Konstantine Shakrili**, a teacher **Platon Shakrili**, a teacher **Kondrat Dzidzaria**, a writer and a party functionary **Mushni Hashba**. Some of them occupied significant positions (**Samson Chanba** (a chairman of the Writers' Union of Abkhazia), **Mushni Hashba** (a chairman of the High

Council of the Abkhaz ASSR), **Andria Chochua** (a director of Sukhumi State Pedagogical Institute) and **Mikheil Delba** (a public commissar of education of the Abkhaz ASSR)).

Georgians - Prof. **Petre Sharia**, Prof. **Simon Janashia**, Prof. **Arnold Chikobava**, Prof. **Varlam Topuria** (everybody from Tbilisi), a researcher of the Abkhazian language **Bagrat Janashia**, a researcher of the Georgian language **Nikandro Basilaia** and a teacher **Sergo Akirtava** (everybody from Sukhumi).

Russians - Prof. **A. Gren**, **I. Timchenko**, **Z. Morina**, and **A. Fadeev**. Three of them were from Moscow, while **A. Fadeev** was from Sukhumi.

The protocol showed, that the work was carried out under an intense ideological pressure. On the one hand, it was stipulated by the presence of party functionaries from Tbilisi and Sukhumi. On the other hand, the pressure was intensified by the attendance of **A. Gren**, **I. Timchenko** and **Z. Morina** - the representatives of All-Union Central Committee of the New Alphabet at the Central Executive Committee of the USSR ("an eye and an ear" of Moscow). The representatives were obliged to control the process and to inform Moscow.

The Georgian scientists were not the initiators of choosing the Georgian graphics for the Abkhazian language. They were forced to take part in this process. This fact is revealed in Prof. **Simon Janashia's** statement:

"We, the workers from Tbilisi, consider ourselves as consultants. The question must be solved by those persons, who raised it: the Abkhazian workers and cultural workers. The question had to be discussed during large meetings" [Gvantseladze, 2011; 456].

Despite the above mentioned intense ideological pressure, the question was discussed academically during the meeting. **Four projects (by 1. Ak. Shanidze; 2. S. Janashia; 3. D. Gulia; 4. D. Gulia, A. Chochua and M. Hashba) were presented for discussion.** The fourth project was rejected for its complicacy, while three others were "delivered" to the special commission chaired by **D. Gulia**. **The members of the commission were: Ak. Shanidze, S. Janashia, V. Kharazia, V. Maani, P.**

Shakrili and M. Hashba. On December 5, the meeting adopted a final project, which was presented by the revising committee. The project consisted of 33 letters of the Georgian alphabet (Mkhedruli), 3 additional letters and 3 diacritics.

The Abkhazian scientists, writers, teachers and party functionaries were the most active participants of the revising committee and three sessions of the meeting. Their speeches did not protest or rebuke the choice of the Georgian graphics as a basis of the Abkhazian writing. 16 participants of the meeting delivered a speech. 11 of them were Abkhazians, who participated in the discussion 22 times: **M. Hashba** - 6 times, **D. Gulia** - 4 times, **K. Dzidzaria** - 3 times, **Kh. Bghajba** - 2 times, **G. Shakirbai**, **N. Pateopha**, **B. Katsia**, **S. Basaria**, **P. Shakrili**, **V. Maani** and **V. Khazaria** - only once. The Georgian participants **P. Sharia** and **Ak. Shanidze** gave a speech 5 times, **S. Janashia** - 3 times, **Arn. Chikobava** - 2 times, **V. Topuria** - only once. **N. Basilaia**, **S. Akirtava** and **B. Janashia** did not deliver a speech.

A special attention must be paid to the behavior of the Russian participants. One of them - A. Fadeev - was from Sukhumi. He and B. Janashia were secretaries of the meeting. On December 4-5 A. Fadeev attended only morning sessions. Russians did not participate in the evening meeting of December 4. The morning session of December 5 was attended only by A. Fadeev. The absence of A. Gren, I. Timchenko and Z. Morina indicated to the fact, that they noticed nothing alarming. The question was discussed according to the plan and Georgians did not oppress Abkhazians. Otherwise, A. Gren's behavior cannot be explained. It's A. Gren, who had never adapted to Georgians' "shovinizm". Even in 1899 in the introduction of the "Megrelian alphabet" - „Мингрельская азбука" (which was created on the basis of the Russian graphics "Cyrillic") he wrote: "When I was compiling this Book of Alphabet, I intended to provoke, even obliquely, the national battle of Megrelians, who are trampled by the stronger Georgian people. Such battle is impossible without the national alphabet [that alphabet], which enables Megrelian to express his/her ideas like his/her enemy, in this case - Georgian" [Khundadze, 1940: 104]. If Prof. A. Gren did not know the attitude of metropolis to the question of using the Georgian graphics as the basis

of the Abkhazian writing, he would attend the meeting and protest the "abuse of Abkhazians' national interests". He knew, that this action was planned by Moscow.

At the end of the closing meeting, a chairman K. Dzidzaria stated:

"During three sessions of December 4-5, the meeting arrived at the unanimous decision and adopted a project of new Abkhazian writing, which was based on the Georgian Alphabet. Therefore, the work for mastering, introducing and spreading of the writing was "established". Hence, it will begin only after its adoption by the highest organ.

A new alphabet will facilitate the closeness of the fraternal people [Abkhazians and Georgians - T.G] and the further development of culture, which has Socialistic content and a national form.

The work of the meeting was fruitful, because it was carried out not only by local workers, but by the professors from Tbilisi (P. Sharia, A. Shanidze, S. Janashia, Arn. Chikobava, V. Topuria) as well. We are grateful to them" [Gvantseladze, 2011: 467].

The above mentioned "highest organ" functioned not only in Sukhumi and Tbilisi (the representatives of one of their groups participated in the work of the meeting), but in Moscow as well. Sukhumi was "presented" by **the Abkhazian Regional Committee of the Communist (Bolshevik) Party of Georgia, the Supreme Council of the Abkhaz ASSR, the Council of Public Commissar of the Abkhaz ASSR and its subordinate - the Public Commissariat of Internal Affairs with its branched agents** in Sukhumi. There also existed a regional committee of new alphabet of the Abkhaz ASSR (a leader - **Zakaria Agrba**), which was obliged to supervise the writing and terminology of those languages, which were spread in Abkhazia. It also coordinated the work with **the highest organ - the Union Central Committee of the New Alphabet at the USSR Central Executive Committee**. Without the permission of the **Central Committee of the New Alphabet**, the Abkhazian committee could not make decisions. This fact stipulated Muscovites' presence at the discussed meetings. All the above mentioned **excluded the discussion and solution of the most significant problem (the graphical basis of literary language) without Moscow's permission.**

The rightness of the conclusion was proved by recently opened five documents, which had been kept in archival management of the Ministry of the Internal Affairs of Georgia. The documents depict some post meeting events of 1938[1].

One of these documents, which was created on 9 March 1938 presents an address of Prof. **S. Janashia** (the director of the Institute of Language, Material Culture and History of the Georgian Branch of the Academy of Science of the USSR) to the chairman of the Council of Public Commissars of the Georgian SSR. The copies of the address were sent to **Giorgi Sturua** - a public commissar of Local Industry of the Georgian SSR, **Petre Sharia** - a chairman of the department of Printed Word and Party Propaganda of the Central Committee of the Georgian Communist Party and **Khechumov** - a chief of polygraphcultural management of Public Commissariat of Local Industry of the Georgian SSR. In the address S. Janashia expressed his indignation for the delay of the preparation of the Abkhazian script on the basis of the Georgian graphics. The text of the address reveals the following real facts:

1. The new Abkhazian alphabet based on the Georgian graphics had already been adopted by the time of the creation of the address. Hence, the organ, which adopted the project was not mentioned in the address;
2. The governing organs charged S. Janashia with the duty of inserting 6 special letters in the Georgian script (according to the above mentioned, the new Abkhazian alphabet consisted of 33 Georgian letters, 3 specific full letters and 3 diacritics). The outline of 3 specific full letters and 3 diacritics was adopted on 11 January 1938 by the Institute of Language, Material Culture and History of the Georgian branch of the Academy of Science of the USSR.
3. According to the concrete plan, 3 specific full letters had to be created from iron till 15 January 1938. The completion of the creation of the script was planned by March 28 of the same year.

4. The responsibility for the creation of the Abkhazian alphabet, which was based on the Georgian graphics was "charged" on S. Janashia or Prof. A. Shanidze (in case of S. Janashia's absence).
5. After the adoption of the outline of the letters of the new alphabet, it was necessary to order the preparation of new linotypes to Max Gelts factory, which was located in Leningrad (This was the only factory of the USSR, which prepared linotypes).

The second document is not dated, but it must be written in 1938. The letter was created in the Russian language and was signed by a public commissar of the local industry of the Georgian SSR **Giorgi Gordeziani** and a chief of cultpolygraphindustry **Lokhishvili**. The addressees were **Max Gelts Factory** and **the Central Scientific-Research Institute of Public Commissariat of the Management of Industry of the Russian Federation** (НИИЦ НКУП РСФСР). The authors asked the addressees to prepare the symbols of 12 letters of the Georgian alphabet, which would be sufficient for the renewal of 20-25 sets of old typographic matrices. It was also stated, that the addressees would be sent the symbols of the Abkhazian and Ossetian letters (7-8 units).

The third document is a protocol of the meeting which was held on 27 August 1938 at the department of the printed word of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Georgia. It stated, that Max Gelts factory would to be sent drafts and notifications about making corrections in the Georgian script.

The fourth document is a report of F. Tagirov (a senior scientific worker of the Scientific-Technical Institute of Polygraph Industry of the Russian Federation) to the department of the Printed Word of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Georgia. The document was created in the Russian language and it's difficult to read it.

The fifth document "the timing of working hours for the preparation of materials for mastering the Georgian matrices by considering the necessary specifications". The given table shows the timing of working hours and considers F. Tagirov's work in Tbilisi and Moscow. The 6th paragraph

of the 3rd division considers **the agreement of the question** with the Management of Polygraph Industry of Public Commissariat of the Local Industry of the Russian Federation and with the Department of the Printed Word of the Central Committee of the Georgian Communist Party.

According to the above mentioned protocols and the documents held in the archival management of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia, we give the following list of institutions, which are presented in the discussed archival materials (the representatives of some institutions participated in the given work):

1. Acad. N. Marr's Scientific-Research Institute of the Abkhazian Culture (Sukhumi);
2. Sukhumi State Pedagogical Institute (Sukhumi);
3. The Writer's Union of Abkhaz ASSR (Sukhumi);
4. The Public Commissariat of Education of Abkhaz ASSR (Sukhumi);
5. The Abkhazian Regional Committee of the Communist (Bolshevik) Party of Georgia (Sukhumi);
6. The Supreme Council of Abkhaz ASSR (Sukhumi);
7. The Institute of Language, Material Culture and History of the Georgian Branch of the Academy of Science of the USSR (Tbilisi);
8. The Council of Public Commissars of the Georgian SSR (Tbilisi);
9. The Public Commissariat of the Local Industry of the Georgian SSR (Tbilisi);
10. The department of Printed Word and Party Propaganda of the Central Committee of the Communist (Bolshevik) Party of Georgia (Tbilisi);
11. Polygraphcultural management of Public Commissariat of Local Industry of the Georgian SSR (Tbilisi);
12. Max Gelts Factory (Leningrad);
13. The Central Scientific-Research Institute of Public Commissariat of the Management of Industry of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (Moscow);
14. The Scientific-Technical Institute of Polygraph Industry of RSFSR (Moscow);

15. The Management of Polygraph Industry of Public Commissariat of the Local Industry of RSFSR (Moscow);
16. The Union Central Committee of the New Alphabet at the Central Executive Committee of the USSR (Moscow);

The multiplicity and geography of these organizations **absolutely exclude** the fact, that the Abkhazian literary language was transferred to the Georgian graphics (Mkhedruli) without the permission of metropolis and during 16 years (1938-1954) nothing was known to the Central Committee of the Communist (Bolshevik) Party of the USSR, the Central Executive Committee of the USSR and the Council of Public Commissars of the USSR. Moreover, it's known, that **this action was carried out on the basis of a special resolution, which considered a necessary transference of literary languages of "title minor nations" of autonomous republics and autonomous regions to the graphics of the language of the title nation of the corresponding union republic** [Papaskiri, 2003:6; Jojua, 2007: 57].

The most convincing is the definition of the above mentioned question given by a historian and a political analyst Dazmir Jojua:

"Formally and (someway) from the point of view of the "cultural facade", this alphabetical reform did not leave an impression of an imperial-assimilative purpose and did not seem as an elicitation of a cultural-civilization hit on "minor nations" - the writings of "minor nations" were transferred to the graphics of state languages of those union republics, which comprised autonomous formations of these nations. Therefore, the system of writing harmonized with a territorial-administrative system and with a general political model of a direct subordination of autonomous units to union republics. This reform was carried out officially, in the framework of an organic legislation and a constitutional system.

Hence, a latent side of the reform is considered in the different analytical flatness, which had an imperial-assimilative character in the context of Russification. Territorial-administrative

structures of only four union republics of the USSR - RSFSR, The Azerbaijan SSR, The Uzbek SSR, The Georgian SSR - had autonomous formations. Only the Georgian language - the state language of the Georgian SSR - had an original alphabet. The writings of state languages of other republics were based on Slavic-Russian alphabet (the so-called Cyrillic).

Therefore, it's obvious, that the main purpose of the "alphabetical revolution" of the second half of the 30s was the transference of writing systems of "minor nations" to Russian-Slavic graphical system and the creation of an effective basis of their cultural-institutional Russification in the framework of this model of unification (this process was carried out in 1936-1941, when the Latin script was massively transferred to "Cyrillic"). The reform of the Abkhazian writing - the transference of the Latin script to the Georgian graphics - was carried out beyond the borders of the imperial model of the "alphabetical revolution" and more exactly, in the context of its alternation. It was not stipulated by I. Stalin's and L. Beria's ethnicity or by a personality cult and Anti-Abkhazian direction of totalitarian-repressive policy of the Soviet regime or by Georgians' attempt to destruct the Abkhazian ethno-cultural originality. The valid reason lies in the following indisputable lingvo-historical fact - the Georgian language was the only state language of the union republics, which had diametrically different (from Cyrillic) alphabetical writing. It's obvious, that imperial center could not neutralize this Georgian specificity and could not make a special decision for Georgia" [Jojua, 2007:57-59].

It's worth mentioning, that there was an attempt of transference of the Latin graphics of the Kurdish language to the Armenian graphics. Hence, Kurds' did not have an autonomous formation in the Armenian SSR and the reform did not consider the transference of their language to the state language (Armenian) of the union republic. Metropolis stopped this outrage and the Kurdish language was transferred to the Russian graphics (Cyrillic).

[1] Archival management, fund 14, description 12, case 383 (9341), Отдел пропаганды, агитации и печати. Материалы об абхазском алфавите. Начато 9.3. 1938 г. Окончено 9.3. 1938 г.

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