

Greeks in South-Georgia and Their Dialect

Gulnara Janova et Maïa Kukchishvili

Samtskhe-Javakheti State University, Georgia

Abstract: South Georgia is multiethnic, multicultural and multi religious. Jews, Greeks, Armenians, Ukrainians, Russians, Dukhobors, Poles, Turks have been living next to Georgians for centuries. Their migration to Georgia is related to different periods. The existence of Greek population in Georgia is a continuation of Georgian-Greek relations and traditions that date back centuries. Georgian Greeks who live in different regions of Georgia can be divided into Hellinophones or Greeks speaking the Ponto dialect of the Greek language and Urums speaking the Urumian dialect. The history of the Greeks living in south Georgia and the language they speak have not been studied extensively. The topic of our research is to study the history of their migration and language, to reveal the changes the language has undergone in lexis and structure and the influence of Meskhuri (Samtskhur-Javakhuri) dialect on it. Although Greek language has undergone some changes during the migration, it is still a means of communication for ethnic Greeks in every part of the world.

Keywords: language; migration; Urums; dialect; Hellinophone

Résumé : Le Midi de la Géorgie est une région multiethnique, multiculturelle et multireligieuse. Les Hébreux, les Grecs, les Arméniens, les Ukrainiens, les Russes, les Dokhobours, les Polonais, les Turcs vivent côte à côte avec les Géorgiens, et ce depuis des siècles. Ils ont émigré en Géorgie à des époques différentes. La présence, depuis des siècles, de Grecs en Géorgie est la prolongation des relations géorgiennes-grecques. Les Grecs habitent des régions différentes de la Géorgie. On peut diviser les Grecs du Midi de la Géorgie en hellénophones, ceux qui parlent le dialecte Ponte, et en Ouroums, ceux qui parlent le dialecte ouroumien. L'histoire de la migration et de la langue des Grecs n'ont pas encore été beaucoup étudiées. C'est pourquoi nous avons décidé d'étudier l'histoire de leur migration et de la langue qu'ils parlent, de fixer les modifications dans leurs langues, de découvrir l'influence des dialectes de Samtskhé et de Djavakhétie et vice versa. Bien que leur langue ait connu des changements, elle reste tout de même un moyen de communication pour les Grecs qui habitent dans des coins différents du monde entier.

Mots-clés : langue; migration; Ouroums; dialecte; hellénophones

Samtskhe-Javakheti is situated in South Georgia. To the south it borders with Turkey and Armenia. Samtskhe-Javakheti played an important role in political, economical and cultural life of the country. The region has been an arena of foreign invasions for centuries. This resulted in the constant changes of religion and ethnic composition of the region. Great part of the population died in the battles against enemies, the other part (mainly Muslim Georgians) was forced to emigrate to other regions of Georgia or to Turkey.

In the 30s of the 19th century a lot of people were immigrated from Turkey to Georgia. They settled in Samtskhe-Javakheti as well. Immigration made the Samtskhe-Javakheti region ethnically diverse. You can meet Greeks, Ukrainians, Jews, Armenians, Russians (among them Dukhobors), Ossetians, Poles, and other ethnic groups here till today.

Before these ethnic groups arrived in Georgia, they had passed a long and heavy way of social-economical and ethno-religious development. They still differ from each other not only by their ethnic background, but their religion, language, historical background, traditions, ethnic values and stereotypes. These differences from one hand and fear of losing their identity from the other hand prevent the process of their integration. But somehow, they manage to co-exist peacefully with each other and local population.

Introduction

The existence of the Greek population in South Georgia continues the tradition of Georgian-Greek relationship which dates back to the ancient times and maybe is an exceptional event in the history of people all over the world because of its duration. But we can't consider the Greeks living in Georgia today either to be the descendants of ancient Greek colonists or heirs of Byzantine Missionaries or craftsmen invited by a royal court of Georgia.

The Greeks were exiled to Georgia from Pontus and the Black Sea regions, Turkey. There were two big moves, one in the 30s-60s of the 19th century and one in the early 20th century. The places inhabited by Greeks were located between Rize from east and Giresun to west. Their centres were: Trabzon, Oenoe, Samsun (former Amisos) and Giumishkhane (former Argirupolis) (see Map 1). According to different sources there were about

102 Greek speaking settlements in Pontus region. Although there were other people in Pontus (for example, Lazebi – a Kartvelian tribe), Greek speaking population was considered to be the majority of the region according to the documents of the Ottoman Empire. First Greek settlements at the the Black Sea coast are connected with the intensive Greek colonization. The Greeks arrived in Georgia in the second half of the 18th century when Erekle II, King of Georgia, invited Greek craftsmen from Anatolia to mine silver and lead.

After the 1828-1829 Russian–Turkish War, the Russian Empire annexed a certain part of south Georgia that was occupied by Turkey before. Tsarist Russia considered the local population (especially those who became Muslims) politically unreliable. That's why Russia decided to take them far from the borderlands and emigrate comparatively reliable and politically desired, easily controlled people on their place. Russia considered Christians - Orthodox Greeks, Grigorian Armenians and Catholics who followed the Armenian typicon living on the territory of Turkey to be such people. They were considered to be Russia's faithful forward units¹.

According to historical sources, in 1763 about 800 families from Giumishkhane settled down in Akhtala region. Their descendants today are the Greeks living in the village Ophreti in Marneuli district (Georgia). Later (in 1813) about 1200 families from Turkey settled down in the village Tsintskaro (Tetrtskaro district). In 1830, 7 000 Greeks from Turkey settled down in Trialeti and founded 18 villages. In the second half of the 19th century the Greeks immigrated to Achara, to the village Iraga (Tetrtskaro district) and to Tsikhijvari (Borjomi district). In the 1860s, Greeks massively settled down in Abkhazia, namely in the nearby villages of Sukhumi. At the end of the same century the number of Greeks in Georgia was about 40 000. Great number of them lived in Tbilisi, Batumi, Sukhumi and other cities of Georgia. The number of Greeks had gradually increased since their arrival in Georgia. If we look through the Census returns of different years, we will see the following: in 1800, 500 Greeks lived in Georgia; in 1832, 7 000;

¹ Tina Ivelashvili, *Etnikuri umtsiresobebi Samtskhe-Javakhetshi*, Publishing House Universali, Tbilisi, 2015, p. 221.

in 1865, 12 000; in 1886, 28 800; in 1897, 38 500; in 1926, 54 000; in 1939, 84 960; in 1959, 72 900; in 1970, 89 200; in 1979, 95 100; in 1989, 100 300. In 2002, only 15 166 Greeks lived in Georgia, out of which 3 792 thousand lived in Tbilisi.

Greeks Immigration to Samtskhe-Javakheti and the Present Situation

Greek colonies in south-west Georgia date back to the ancient times, although old Georgian historic sources say nothing about Greeks existence in Samtskhe-Javakheti. There is no document which states that today's Greek population in Georgia has any connection with those Greeks who appeared in West Georgia in the 7th century BC. According to the existed materials, today's Greek population appeared in Georgia in the last quarter of the 18th century.¹ Greeks in Georgia today are the Greeks who immigrated to Georgia from Northern and Eastern districts of Turkey.

The aim of our research is to study the history of Greeks immigration to Samtskhe-Javakheti and the present situation, their traditions, cuisine, the language they speak, the influence their language had undergone (see Maps 2 and 3).

Tsarist officials supported Greeks' immigration to Samtskhe-Javakheti. It was carried out in several stages. In 1813, 120 Greek families arrived in Caucasus from Pasen region, Turkey. After the 1828-29 Russian-Turkish War, Russia managed to add the issue of exchanging the population in the Regulation of the Andrianopole Treaty. Sixty fice thousands Muslim Georgians (11 000 -12 000 families) fled to different vilayets of Turkey from Samtskhe-Javakheti².

According to this Resolution, the Greeks should go back to Greece but instead, a great part of them moved to Georgia together with the Armenians. They settled down in the ancient dwellings of Muslim Georgians who had

¹ Simon Kaukchishvili, « Kutaisi sakhelmtsifo pedagogiuri institutis shromebi », *Berdznebis dasakhlebis istoria saqartveloshi*, Volume 6, Publishing House Kutaisi, 1946, p. 219.

² Shota Lomsadze, *Samtskhe-Javakhetshi, XVII saukunis shuatslebidan XIX saukunis shuatslebamde*, Tbilisi, Publishing House Metsniereba, 1975, p. 320.

moved to Turkey. According to Kirilov I.K. in 1830 about 50 Greek families settled down in Akhalkalaki. Later a great part of them became Armenians. In the same period, about 100 Greek families settled down in the ancient settlements of Shavtskala gorge in Samtskhe. Many of them compactly settled down in Tsikhijvari. Among them were people with Georgian family names, later they assimilated with Greeks and were written as “Greeks”¹.

In 1914-1918, a new wave of Greeks moved from Turkey to Caucasus. According to the Resolution which was taken at Lozana Conference (1922-1923) after the World War I, Turkey and Greece should exchange their population. All ethnic groups should return to their Motherland. But the same has happened, Greeks preferred Caucasus to live, as it happened in 1829-1830 years².

According to the official data at the end of the 19th century 11 578 Greeks lived in Smatskhe-Javakheti, namely in Akhalkalaki, Baraleti, Ninotsminda (former Bogdanovka), Atskuri, Akhaltsikhe, Trialeti-Tsalka, Borjomi, Tori, Mikeltsminda, Tsikhijvari, Bakuriani etc. According to the 1925 Census, the number of Greeks in Georgia was more than 24 000³.

We have got an interesting material from the informers' (Vladimer Zedginidze and Revaz Andghguladze) personal archives. It is connected with 1882 Census of the Caucasian population (not only population but state and private lands, churches, mills...). The census returns were published in 1886. According to the census the number of Greeks in Samtskhe-Javakheti was the following: Akhalkalaki, Varevani community (villages - Varevani, Azavreti, Alastani..) - 629 families, out of which Greeks - 9 families, 29 men and 23 women. Village- Varevani- 7 Greek families, 21 men and 17 women; village- Alastani -1 Greek family; village- Kartsakhi- 1 Greek family; At that time there were no Greek families in the village Khospio. Greeks seem to appear in Khospio later.

¹ Tina Ivelashvili, « Onomastikuri krebuli », *Urumebi – vinaoba da sakheltsodeba*, Akhaltsikhe, Publishing House Akhalcikhis universiteti, 2013, p. 76-77.

² *Ibid.*, p. 78.

³ Ламара Пашаева, *семья и семейный быт греков Цалского района*, Издательство Мецниереба, Tbilisi, 1992, p. 13.

As an informer- Darejan Matsukatova states her ancestors arrived first in the village Rekha from Kars, Turkey in 1918-19, then they lived in the village Kotelia for a short period and then moved to the village Khospio. So, Greeks in Khospio appeared later at the beginning of the 20th century.

According to the census returns the Greeks compactly resided only in the village Mikeltsminda. Out of 12 families, 10 were Greeks – 32 men, 31 women and 2 families were Georgian. 10 Greek families-32 men, 31-women are mentioned in Akhaltsikhe Uyezd.

According to the same document, there were 11 Greek families, 25 men, 24 women in Borjomi region. In the village – Tsikhijvari out of 74 families, 71 were Greek, 238 men, and 216 women. Only one family was Georgian, Mikeladze – a Muslim Georgian from Khulo, Achara. There were no Greek families in Aspindza, Varkhani, Klde at that time. Later, 111 families (721 people) settled down there.

There was a distributing centre in Akhalkalaki, where immigrants were registered, filtered and distributed to different places to live. The Russian government gave the immigrants a loan in cash, 25 rubles in silver and 2 dessiatina land for building a house. The government gave them also clothes and food.

Because of heavy economical condition, some Georgians having neither ancestral houses nor lands settled in those places but unlike Greeks, they were not given any help. Heavy social conditions made them change their family names and become Greeks. So, this way they had lost their Georgian family names and ethnicity (Informer- Revaz Andghuladze).

Nowadays, the Greeks compactly live in the village-Mikeltsminda, Akhaltsikhe district, in Tsikhijvari, Borjomi district and in Khospio, Akhalkalaki district. Besides, they live in Akhaltsikhe, Akhalkalaki, Borjomi, Aspindza, Adigeni, Vale and in some villages of the region.

As we have mentioned above, Greeks compactly reside in the village Khospio (Akhalkalaki district). Today there are 10 Greek families there (10 Matsukatovs and 1 Kalaichev). They are “Urum” Greeks. Their native language is Georgian but all of them know Urumian (old people use Urumian as a means of

communication even today). Young people speak Armenian and Russian languages besides Georgian and Urumian.

As Michail Kolikidi- the head of Samtskhe-Javakheti Regional Greek Association in Akhalkalaki writes “Greeks mainly live in Akhalkalaki, Ninotsminda and in the villages Khospio and Bavra. Kolikidis, Matsukatovs, Eminovs, Kostantinovs, Kartais, Efremiadi are the main family names living here. There are about 163 Greeks (among them those whose mothers are Greek) in Akhalkalaki district¹.

According to the head of Akhaltsikhe district Greek Association – G. Janova, Greeks live in Akhaltsikhe, Adigeni, Aspindza, Vale and in the villages: Mikeltsminda, Klde, Varkhani etc. You can meet Kesishevs, Ivanovs, Matsukatovs, Janovs, Paputsidi, Tosunovs, Kalaijevs, Lipiridi, Nikolaevs, Gerasimidi, Adamidi, Gramatopulo, Kostantinovs, Kharitovs, Kilinkarovs, Onufriadi, Sauridi, Apostolidi, Pendiarovs, Persopulo in Akhaltsikhe. Negnosovs, Kesovs, Keshishevs, Sevastovs, Paraskevidi in Vale, Karibovs, Nikadimovs in the village – Klde, Antonovs in the villages: Mugareti and Fersa, Tersenov in Minadze, Iordanov in Tsnisi. The Greeks intermarried and culturally mixed with Georgians, Armenians, and other ethnic groups. There are about 100 Greek (among them mixed) families in Akhaltsikhe district.

In 1920-1921 years, one part of Greeks from Rabati (the old part of Akhaltsikhe) returned to their historical Motherland-Greece. They founded several villages there and called one of them Georgiano, to show their love to Georgia. In 1997 a delegation from Akhaltsikhe Municipality passed this village by chance. An old man whose family name was Nikolaidi and who by that time (in 1997) was already 92 years old, remembered very well that he was 13 years old when his family had moved from Rabati to Greece. He even remembered some Russian words (красная площадь, здравствуй).

The Greeks of Samtskhe-Javakheti couldn't avoid the political cataclysms which happened at the end of the Second World War. In 1944 Greeks (but only those who had temporary passports, who after three months must have

¹ Fotios Chitlidis, Pavle Karagiozov, *Saqartvelos berdznul satvistomota kavshiri – 20 tseli*, Publishing House Forma, Tbilisi, 2012, p. 232-233.

returned back to Trabzon or other cities of Turkey, where they came from) were exiled to Kentau, Central Asia. Later some families (Nikolaevs, Paputsidi) returned back to Akhaltsikhe, some stayed in Kentau, others left for Greece¹.

Greeks in south Georgia are fully integrated, some of them are even assimilated with Georgians. Some of them changed their family names. For example: some Matsukatovs changed their family name into Javakhidze (in Khospio), one brother in the village Klde is Karibov, the other is Karibashvili, some Kostantinovs changed their surname into Berdzenidze, Ivanov became Ioanidze (in Akhaltsikhe) etc.

Tsikhijvari is the only settlement inhabited by Greeks in Borjomi region. It is a high mountainous village (1700 m. above the sea level). Greek Elynophons immigrated here in 1861 from Trabzon and Kars vilayets. In the last decade, a lot of Greeks from Tsikhijvari left for Greece and Cyprus. Today 140 families, about 400 people, live here. The people living here don't have any wish to leave for Greece. There is a Russian school in the village with 50 pupils².

So, the Greeks in south Georgia live peacefully and in love with the local population. Economic crisis in Georgia made Greeks leave for Greece, many of them have double citizenship. Children of Greek ethnic background in Samtskhe-Javakheti mainly go to Georgian schools, though few of them go to Russian schools.

Language, Elynophons and Urums

The Greeks living in Samtskhe-Javakheti come from two different linguistic traditions: Pontic and Urumian. The Greeks in Georgia are conditionally divided into two groups: 1. Elynophons, those who speak the Pontic dialect and 2. Urums, those who speak the Urumian dialect. However, one can meet Greeks who don't speak either the Pontic dialect or Urumian. Their native language is either Georgian or Russian. Greek children mostly go to Georgian or Russian schools. Besides, Greek children (and those whose mothers are Greek) have the opportunity to learn Modern Greek and culture.

¹ Fotios Chitlidis, Pavle Karagiozov, *op. cit.*, p. 237.

² *Ibid.*, Pavle Karagiozov, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

They have classes (two times a week) at Samtsilhe – Javakheti Greek Regional Association in Akhaltsikhe and Akhalkalaki.

The Pontic dialect occupies an independent position among Modern Greek dialects. Some researchers consider it even as a separate language. One can find traces of Old Greek in Pontic dialect which are not found in other dialects. There are some differences between Modern Greek and the Ponto dialect. e. g sound /ʃ / which doesn't exist in Modern Greek. The Pontic dialect was originated in the 6-7th cc. It was spoken in Pontus (country, which covered south and south-east territories of the Black Sea coast).

The Greeks speaking the Pontic dialect call themselves “Romeos” (rarely Ellynos) but Urumian dialect speaking Greeks are called “Urums” (Latin word “Roma” means a subordinate to the Eastern Roman Empire). Both names come from the term Rome. As it is known in the Greek tradition, the Greeks living in the East of the Roman Empire (even in the Byzantine Epoch) were called Romans. The word “Romeos” comes from Roman, but the term “Urum” is disputable. There are different opinions about its meaning among scholars. Korelov I. thinks that “Urums” are ethnically Orthodox Greeks emigrated from Erzurum-Giumishkhane who don't know Greek and whose native language is Turkish. He also denotes that according to ethnographic features they belong to the Georgian-Caucasian-Ottoman world more than to the Greek one¹.

According to the Georgian Explanatory Dictionary, “Urum” is a Greek word and means ‘Roman’. As Grigol Beridze writes “ Urumi “means – Greek. Pashaeva Lamara thinks that the term – “Urum” is a Latin word and means “Roman”. It was originated after falling the East Roman Empire and after the Turkish invasion of this territory. This term refers to all people (among them – Lazebi – a Georgian tribe) who lived in the invaded territory of Anatolia regardless of their ethnic origin².

According to the Turkish Explanatory Dictionary (1988:1231) “Urum” is an Arabic word by origin and means: 1. a person, Greek by origin living

¹ Tina Ivelashvili, *Etnikuri umtsiresobebi Samts khe-Javakhetshi*, p. 73.

² *Ibid.*, p. 73-74.

in Muslim countries; 2. everything what is Greek; 3. is a historic term; 4. a citizen living in the East Roman Empire having the Romans' rights¹.

Prof. Micheil Gurjiev in his letter to EU/COE Joint program: Civic Integration of National Minorities in Georgia and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages: on 16.09.2015 states that the Urumian language is one of the oldest dialects of the Greek language. In his opinion the "Urumian" language had never been the dialect of the Turkish language as some researchers write. To prove his point of view, Micheil Gurjiev bases on different scholars' works like: Sobolevskii S.I. (The old Greek Language. M., 1948); Beletskii A.A. (Principles of etymological researches (based on the Greek language material) K., 1953); Tumb A. (Handbuch der griechischen Dialekte Bd 1-2 Hdlb., 1932-59); Meillet A. (Aperçu d'une histoire de la langue grecque. P. 1937); Buck C.D. (The Greek dialects. Chi., 1955); The great Soviet Encyclopedia. Vol. 7. M. 1972) etc. Moreover, he writes that The New Gospel is written in the Urumian language only with Greek writing as the Urumian language has no alphabet. Urumian is spoken mainly by the Greeks from Anatolia who were exiled from their Motherland in 1829 after finishing the Russian – Turkish war².

We support the idea that both terms "Ellynophon" and "Urum" denote the same – a person living in Eastern Roman Empire. The difference is only in language. Ellynophons speak the Pontic dialect but Urums speak the Urumian dialect. They preserved Christianity, language, family names: Paputidi, Sauridi, Lipiridi, Adamidi etc. Though some of the surnames have the Russian ending: Keshishev (former Papandopulo) Janov (Mikhailidi), Ivanov (Ioanidi), etc. The reasons can be explained historically.

Research showed us that the Pontic dialect the Greeks speak at home with family members or use it to communicate with other Ponto Greeks hasn't changed a lot. Though, some of them sometimes use either Russian, Turkish or Georgian words or phrases in their speech.

¹ Türkçat sözlükö, t. 2, Turkish Linguists' Society, Ankara, 1988, p. 1231.

² Micheil Gurjiev, *A letter to EU/COE Joint program "Civic Integration of National Minorities in Georgia and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages"* on 16.09.2015.

The informers (who also speak Modern Greek) said that they mainly use Georgian lexis in commends or curses. For example: Damn you! (მეხო ღუგუგეს) (Samtskhuri dialect) or “Be happy”, “Bless you” (გაიხარე, გამრავლდი) ... They also use some Russian - e.g. “tarelka” (plate), “uzhe” (already) “davai” (come on), “priroda” (nature) and Turkish words (e.g. “iok” (iox Janum – No , my dear, “kyashkyam” (I wonder), “peshkiri” (a handkerchief).

One of the informers (whose mother is Greek) said that she uses the Pontic dialect in two cases. 1. to tell secrets to her brother. 2. to care her children. She said that she mostly uses the following “Pontic” words and phrases. e.g. “αγαπώ σας” (I love you). It’s curious, but she also said that Greek women like to curse.

As the survey shows, there are almost no changes in the Pontic dialect in Samtskhe-Javakheti. The dialect preserved its lexis, morphological and phonetical characteristics. But its existence is in danger. The reasons are different. The first reason is that youth prefers to learn Modern Greek, the second reason is mixed marriages, the third and the most important is the environment. Today, the Pontic dialect is spoken only in the places where Greeks live compactly (vil. Mikeltsminda and Tsikhijvari).

Tsarist Russia opened Greek schools in compactly populated by Greeks regions. Immigrated Greeks went to Greek schools. There was a three year Greek school in Mikeltsminda. Georgians living in that village had to go to Greek school. In the 1930s-1940s, Greek school was closed. And a lot of Greeks moved to Rabati where there was a four year Greek school till the beginning of the World War II¹. There was a Greek school in the village Tsikhijvari too. In 1920-21 a Greek school was opened in Borjomi. Generally there were 36 Greek schools in Georgia but in the Soviet period Greek schools were closed and Greek children had to go to either Russian or Georgian schools. As informers say there was a Week School in Rabati as well. It should be mentioned that the Greek residents of Rabati spoke Georgian and vice versa.

¹ Tina Ivelashvili, *Etnikuri umtsiresobebi Samtskhe-Javakhetshi*, p. 84.

The interest towards the Greek language has increased since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Modern Greek became popular in Georgia. It has been taught at Samtskhe-Javakheti State University (situated in Akhaltsikhe) since 1995 by the initiative of a university rector and a head of Akhaltsikhe District Greek Association with the support of Patra University (Greece) and the Ministry of Education of Greece. Successful students participate in students exchange programs and raise their knowledge in different universities of Greece. Besides, almost every year students have a native speaker who helps them to develop their speaking skills.

In 2001 by the initiative of Akhaltsikhe District Greek Association and a Greek teacher from Greece, Samtskhe-Javakheti was involved in the program – “Greek language at schools in Georgia” (with the support of the Ministry of Education and Sciences of Georgia, the Greece Embassy in Georgia and the Institute of Classical language, Byzantiology and Neohellenism). Modern Greek is taught in several public schools in Akhaltsikhe and Aspindza and in the villages Ude and Arali, Adigeni district.

Modern Greek is taught to Greek children (among them to those whose mothers and grandmothers are Greek) twice a week in Akhaltsikhe and Akhalkalaki at Samtskhe-Javakheti Greek Association with the support of Greek Embassy in Georgia and the Federation of Greeks in Georgia.

It shows that the interest of young generation to Modern Greek is still high. But in recent years the situation has changed. University students prefer learning English and specialize in other specialties to be employed well and get a highly paid jobs.

Traditions and Cuisine

When Greeks migrated to South Georgia, they brought their traditions with them. Survey shows that Greeks' and Georgians' traditions are almost the same in Samtskhe-Javakheti. Maybe it is explained by the fact that both people are Orthodox Christians and the second as Academician G. Chitaia writes, a part of Urums are from the Georgian provinces – Kaldei and Basiani. That's why they have maintained some Georgian traditions.

Celebrating Christmas was a great holiday for Greeks in Rabati (an old part of Akhaltsikhe). A man who played a musical instrument, *chianuri* and a group of children who shouted the word *-Kalanda* moved from house to house. Children sang Christmas carols in Pontic dialect and danced, in case if people opened the door of their house and gave them some sweets. It was a good sign and meant that the family would have a good year.

Giving Greek names to newly born children was also a tradition. The Greeks gave their children mainly the following Greek names: Anesti, Aproditi, Vasili, Parthena, Khristo, Vasiliki, Sotiria, Georgos, Maria, Sofia, Ioanis, Veniamin, Mikheil, Stali, Stili. Elena, Emanuel, Elada and soon. But nowadays, many of them give their children any name they like.

The informer (Vladimer Zedginidze) speaks about the tradition of *natlimironoba* (Christening) in this concrete case between Greeks and Turks. It strengthened the relationship between Christians and Muslims, they lived in peace and understanding. “My aunt asked a Turk to christen her child as all her children had died soon after their birth. The Georgian church allowed a Muslim to christen my aunt’s daughter at an Orthodox church. To everyone’s surprise, the child was saved. After *natlimironoba* the families became relatives and during the attacks the Turks took care of Christians saying “they are our relatives “and vice versa. This way they protected their families. Such traditions can’t be founded in one day. It needed time, patient and relationship”.

Greeks’ cuisine is almost the same as Georgian, mainly in Meskheta but still there are differences. Greeks in Samtskhe-Javakheti make *Shirvani* (Matsoni soup). A cook boils “gherghili” (large ground corn) in a saucepan, then pours filtered matsoni or “do” (buttermilk) dissolved in water, adds fried onions in butter and throws some marjoram above it. In the past this dish was served at funerals.

Halva was traditional sweets on the second day of the wedding party. Relatives had a tradition. They joked, told poetry and laughed at themselves.

Sutlashi (rice boiled in milk) looks like the Georgian dish.

Galichozhi – is a kind of dish made of dry bread broken into small pieces, added with fried onions in butter and poured with filtered matsoni dissolved in water.

Makarina and *Sironi* are the same. Only, they use sour cream instead of filtered matsoni dissolved in water (com. Acharian Sinori).

As for other dishes Greeks and Georgians mostly have the same ones.

Greek Words in Meskhuri Dialect

One can find some Greek words in the Georgian language especially in the Meskhuri dialect.

The examples in this paper are taken from the article by Maia Kukchishvili and Merab Beridze. Such word is - *sinori* (sironi). It comes from the Greek language. It was mentioned first by D. Chubinashvili, later it appeared in the Explanatory Dictionary of the Georgian Language. In the Explanatory Dictionary of the Modern Greek language¹ we find the following definition of the word - “sinors” (το σύνορο): a real line which divides two places or two countries; a region of one country, which is situated near the border line; τα σύνορα is used in plural, to denote geographical places - internal or foreign borders, e.g. a line of death and life and defines its etymology το σύνορο is a composite συν + όρος, where συν is a prefix of Old Greek that means the unity of something, but όρος - means the end,². The same is confirmed in all modern Explanatory Dictionaries of the Greek language. Among them in the Dictionary by Manolis Triandafilidis³. In Samtskhe-Javakheti the word “sironi” forms some place names. Above the village Orchosani, Adigeni district, near the Turkish border, there is a high stone called sironi and its surrounding places Sironebi (“Sironi” in plural). Sironi /sironebi is a name of fields between the villages Chobareti and Zveli in Aspindza district. Besides as Grigol Beridze writes in Javakheti there is

¹ Γεωργίου Μπαμπινιώτη, Λεξικό της Νέας Ελληνικής Γλώσσας, kentro leqsiologias E.P.E., Αθήνα, 2002

² *Ibid.*, p. 1710.

³ Μανόλης Τριανταφύλλης, Λεξικό της Νέας Ελληνικής Γλώσσας, 1999, p. 530, 531.

Sinori, “village” Kilda and Toki field¹. Sinori/sironi are two variants of one word. One of them is a result of Metathesis. Namely, sironi is a main form in the Meskhuri dialect.

So, the word “sironi” is widely used in the dialectical lexis in Samtskhe-Javakheti, namely in Alhalkalaki, Aspindza, Akhaltsikhe and Adigeni districts and means, a line, a border between fields, villages or countries. In Turkish the word has the form – sinir. Given examples show us that the word- “sironi” was created on the contacts of languages².

Very interesting is a Greek word – “phsomi” (ψωμή), in Meskhuri dialect – somini. Words “Somini” and bread are used in the same meaning. But somehow, there is a difference between them. Bread is comparatively small but somini is big. According to Prof. Tina Ivelashvili “Somini is two and a half kg. round bread. It is baked in a wood fired oven out of Doli (kind of wheat) flour. It took an hour and a half to bake somini. One wood fired oven somini was enough for a five-six member family for a week³.

In the dictionary of Modern Greek Language, Babiniotis gives the definition and etymology of Greek bread “psomi (ψωμή). It says that in Old Greek today’s bread “psomi” (ψωμή) is given in “psomion” ψωμί < ψωμίον < ψωμός < ψη- < ψην form⁴.

The etymology of this word shows that Georgian “somini” is closer to the Old Greek “psomion” (ψωμίον), than to its modern form. It should be said that the names of the items which were used in wood fired oven for baking bread were Georgian.

Words - “sira” (row, line), lakhana (a cabbage) and “akhori” (a place for keeping animals) are Greek by origin. They are used in the same meaning in the Georgian language and are widely used in Meskhuri dialect.

¹ Grigol Beridze, *Javakhuri dialeqtis saleqsikono masala*, Publishing House Sabchota Saqartvelo, Tbilisi, 1981, p. 201.

² Maia Kukchishvili, Merab Beridze « Nasoflari Erkota », *Berdznuli tsarmomavlobis sakhelebi Meskhur dialeqtshi*, 2013, p. 92.

³ Tina Ivelashvili *khalkhuri samareulo*, Publishing House Sadari, Tbilisi, 1991, p. 5-6.

⁴ Γεωργίου Μπαμπινιώτη, *op. cit.*, p. 1997.

Conclusion

So, Greeks in South Georgia have been living since the 1860s. During this period Greeks were integrated with the local population and in some cases they were even assimilated, particularly in mixed families. In spite of it, they preserved their traditions, ethnic background, identity and language though they didn't refuse to adapt to the Georgian reality, to learn the state (Georgian) language, Georgian culture and traditions. Peaceful co-existence of different ethnic groups in this region, especially Georgians and Greeks is an exceptional event in the world history.

To our mind both Elynophons and Urums are Greeks by ethnic background and identity, the only difference is the language. The language the Ponto Greeks speak hasn't changed a lot in South Georgia. But in spite of it, you come across some Georgian, Russian and Turkish words and phrases in the Pontic dialect. The collapse of the Soviet Union and new contacts with Greece raised the interest to the Modern Greek language. Naturally, the usage of the Pontic dialect as a means of communication has reduced. There are some words Greek by origin in Meskhuri dialect, which are actively used both by Greeks and Meskhhs.

It is interesting to highlight that the Pontic dialect remained to be a means of communication for all Ponto Greeks all over the world (Australia, Germany, Greece).

The migration process is still going on. In the 1990s a great number of Greeks moved from Georgia to Greece – to their ancestors' Motherland. Mainly the youth left for Greece, the reason of which is the heavy social-economical situation in Georgia. But a lot of Greeks in Samtskhe-Javakheti preferred to stay and be citizens of Georgia. Today's crisis in Greece makes them return back to their Motherland, Georgia.

Greeks in South Georgia preserved their language and traditions. Unfortunately, youth prefers to learn Modern Greek and few of them use the Pontic dialect as a means of communication today. The Greeks easily adapted to the Georgian reality. They speak the state (Georgian) language fluently. If not the family names, one can't say they are not Georgians.

Georgian Greeks love Greece but at the same time adore Georgia, respect Georgian people and culture. Greeks and Georgians have a lot in common. They speak Georgian, respect the same saints, celebrate the same holidays, go to the same church and pray.

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Informers:

1. Prof. Gurjiev Micheil
2. Onufriadi (Gerasimidi) Stali, 88 years old.
3. Gerasimidi Sotiria, 74 years old.
4. Peikrishvili (Onufriadi) Nina, 64 years old.
5. Chechelashvili (Tosunova) Maria, 67 years old.
6. Andghuladze Revaz, 65 years old.
7. Zedginidze Vladimer (Mother- Gramatopulo), 68 years old.
8. Zedginidze Elene (Mother- Gramatopulo), 65 years old.
9. Matsikatova Darejan, 69 years old.



