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Central Caucasian religious systems and social ideology in the post-Soviet period.

1. OBJECTIVES. While conducting field research in the Republic of Georgia in 1996 and 1997, supported by a grant from SSHRC, we had the occasion to visit the provinces of Khevsureti and Pshavi. To our astonishment, the great summer festival of *Atengenoba* — accompanied by dances, rituals and animal sacrifice, as in the descriptions of a century ago — is still being celebrated in many highland communities. We interviewed numerous *xevisberebi* (“pagan” priests; throughout this text, “priests” will designate *xevisberebi* rather than Orthodox clergy), shrine officials and other villagers, who described a relatively coherent body of beliefs, practices and rituals which appears to have changed little since pre-Soviet times, even as several key components of traditional culture, to be discussed in the following section, have been lost or radically changed. For numerous reasons, we believe it important, indeed, urgent, to undertake ethnographic work in the Central Caucasian communities at present and over the next few years. The primary objectives of the proposed project are:

(1) *Synchronic analysis*: The description and study of the religious beliefs and practices of the Northeast Georgian highlanders, and, for comparative purposes, those of their Chechen, Ingush, Ossetian and lowland Georgian neighbours. Among the aspects of the problem to be examined are: (a) the changes in the belief system since the pre-Soviet period; (b) the ways in which beliefs and practices are passed on to the younger generations, especially those who live quasi-permanently in the lowlands; (c) attitudes toward the traditional belief system and way of life among various segments of the population (by age, sex, residence, occupation, etc.); (d) degree and manner of participation in rituals and ceremonies by different segments of the population, in particular by members of other ethnic groups. Special attention will be given to the study of representations of the spatial opposition between interior and exterior in the religious system and social ideology, as reflected in the structuring of the pantheon, rituals, prayers and

myths, attitudes toward the outside world (and toward foreigners), and relations between the sexes.

(2) *Longitudinal study*: The death in 1981 of the *xevisberi* (priest) Bich'uri Badrishvili marked the end of an era in highland Georgian religion. Badrishvili was born in the 1870's, and received his "vocation" — marked by illness, dreams of flying and visions — while still a child. At age 17, he was consecrated with the blood of nine bulls sacrificed by his family, and began service as a *xevisberi*, a function he fulfilled for the next ninety years. Throughout his long career, Badrishvili was recorded by Georgian folklorists; the earliest texts attributed to him were published in the 1920's. Several priests now serving were either chosen by Badrishvili while he was alive, or saw visions of him after his death. One of them claims to have received the text of a sacrifice-consecration prayer from Badrishvili in a dream. We also interviewed Badrishvili's daughter Thek'le, who has provided invaluable information about her father's life and career. In the course of the next several years, we wish to (a) continue collecting texts and biographical materials concerning Badrishvili; (b) compare these with recordings, interviews and observations of his successors at the shrines of Iremtk'alo, Iaqhari, Lashara and Tamar-Ghele, with the aim of evaluating continuity and change in highland religious practices; (c) if the opportunity presents itself, observe the selection and installation of new priests.

(3) *Historical analysis*: On the basis of contemporary and documentary evidence, what can be inferred about the Central Caucasian cultural area at various stages in its past? What can be learned about the nature and intensity of contacts — cultural, economic, migrational, etc. — between the highlands and lowlands, and between the North and South Caucasus? How do beliefs, motif clusters (e.g. in myths), elements of social ideology, etc., characteristic of the Central Caucasus compare, or contrast, with corresponding elements from the early Indo-European, Near Eastern, and Circumpontic cultural areas? As an initial hypothesis, the predominant alignment of highland Caucasian social ideology will be conceived as *horizontally* oriented, according an especially rich symbolic treatment to the opposition between interior and exterior, 'domestic' and 'savage' space. Men (the patriline) are associated with the former, women and outsiders with the latter. Contact with the exterior world is represented as potentially

dangerous (or polluting) and yet necessary for the survival of the community. Contrasted with horizontally-aligned Caucasian social ideology will be the symbolic system of the early Indo-European peoples, whose social ideology, as Dumézil has demonstrated in a long series of monographs (e.g. Dumézil 1992), emphasizes the vertical division of the community into three ‘functions’ — priestly, warrior and agricultural — whereas the spatial dimension appears to have been less salient. (In some Indo-European societies, interestingly, an inside/outside opposition seems to have been superimposed onto the trifunctional schema, either through bifurcation of the deities representing the first and second function into divinities ‘near to’ and ‘distant from’ human society [Sergent 1997] or the addition of a so-called ‘fourth function’ representing the exterior, transcendent, etc. [Allen 1996]).

2. CONTEXT. The earliest descriptions of the Caucasus emphasized its high diversity of peoples and languages. According to the geographer Pliny, the Romans needed 130 interpreters to carry on business in the port city of Dioscurias (located on the site of the Abkhaz capital of Sukhumi). The Arabs referred to the region as the “mountain of tongues” (Catford 1977). There are at present some 50 or more ethnic groups in the North Caucasus (Karachay-Cherkess, Kabardo-Balkar, Chechen, Ingush, Ossetian and Dagestani Republics of southern Russia) and in the Transcaucasian republics of Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan, speaking as many languages. Of particular interest to this project are the communities living in the Central Caucasian highlands. From west to east these are the Abkhazians, Karachays and Balkars, Svans, Ossetes, Chechens, Ingush, Khevsurs, Pshavs and Tushetians, and the various Dagestani groups. The principal focus of field research will be on the Georgian-speaking Khevsurs and Pshavs, for the following reasons: (i) there is an especially rich documentation of their oral literature, religious practices and other aspects of their culture dating back to the mid-19th century; (ii) these beliefs and practices were maintained to a more recent period (right up until the 1940’s and 50’s) than in the predominantly Islamic North Caucasus; (iii) one of the principle investigator’s Georgian colleagues has been visiting Pshav-Khevsureti on an annual basis over the past twenty years, and has amassed an impressive (unpublished) archive of sound recordings and photographs, including interviews with many now-deceased priests — among

them Bich'uri Badrishvili, who was mentioned above — and community leaders. This material will permit us to study the nature of transmission of rituals, prayers, invocations, etc. from a generation of ritual specialists born in the pre-Soviet period to their successors.

(a) *The pre-Soviet period.* According to archeological and paleolinguistic evidence, speakers of the three families of indigenous Caucasian languages (Northwest Caucasian, Northeast Caucasian, and South Caucasian), have occupied areas roughly corresponding to their present homelands since at least the Bronze Age. Despite a popular depiction of the Caucasian mountaineers as isolated and xenophobic (Charachidzé once asserted that “les guerriers de la montagne n'échangent que des femmes ou des morts” [1986: 64], i.e. women in marriage or deaths in vendetta), the ethnographic, linguistic and archeological dossiers indicate unequivocally that since the distant past even the most remote highland communities have been linked with their neighbours through a complex web of kinship (including fictive kinship) ties, and the exchange of goods and services. As early as the 3rd millenium BC sites in the Central Caucasus were exploited for high-grade arsenic-rich copper. A Bronze Age cemetery recently reported in Mutsos Kheoba near the Georgian-Chechen frontier indicates that this remote area was densely settled five millenia ago, and linked by trade routes to the lowlands, whence goods produced from Caucasian copper made their way as far as Mesopotamia [Gadzhiev 1987; Kushnareva & Rysin 1996]. Linguistics confirms the findings of archeology: The lexical stocks of the Caucasian languages contain ancient borrowings both from other indigenous languages, as well as from early Indo-European and Near Eastern languages.

The ethnographic accounts of the 18th and 19th centuries attest to the mobility and poly-lingualism of the Caucasian highlanders [e.g. Rexviashvili 1974; Volkova 1978], and more importantly, to a pervasive network of alliances and relations of mutual dependancy and support, which crosscut ethnic and religious boundaries. In addition to seasonal movement associated with transhumant animal husbandry, and regular trade between mountain communities and their lowland neighbours (e.g. for salt, which was in dangerously short supply in many highland areas), communities specializing in particular crafts sent artisans to ply their trade among nearby ethnic groups. Highland farm labourers went far abroad on both sides of

the Caucasus in search of work, as did traders and itinerant craftspeople. Fictive kinship ties, such as sworn brotherhood and milk sibblinghood (children sent to be raised by families of a different ethnic group), formed the infrastructure within which people, goods and ideas circulated. This system, reinforced by firmly-held principles concerning the obligations of Caucasian hosts to their guests, enabled what would appear to outsiders to be a surprising degree of mobility in a supposedly xenophobic environment. Long-standing bonds between highland and lowland communities, or between North and South Caucasian groups (even where the linked communities professed different official religions), provided opportunities for long-term and even permanent resettlement. Chechen families fleeing blood feuds or failed harvests have resettled in northern Georgia, and vice-versa. Typically, the incoming family attached itself to a local clan with which it already had (fictive) kin ties, and performed the rituals and sacrifices which affiliated the newcomers to the local shrine and its protective deity. Other such movements were less permanent. Baliauri [1991: 114] recounts how in the early part of the century a young Georgian couple, fleeing the wrath of their families because their relation was considered incestuous, escaped to a community in the adjacent province of Ingushetia. They were ‘baptized’ [*moinatla*] in the religion of their hosts (Islam), and remained among the Ingush for ten years, until their relatives were willing to be reconciled with them. At that point they returned to their village in Georgia.

Relations between families, clans and communities, as well as those between the sexes, need to be understood against the background of Central Caucasian ideological systems, of which the best studied are those of the Pshavs and Khevsurs of northeastern Georgia [see especially Bardavelidze 1957, Charachidzé 1968, K’ik’nadze 1996]. As documented at the turn of the century, Pshav-Khevsur religion represented the syncretism of Orthodox Christian symbols and a distinctly un-Orthodox ideological framework, with a series of binary oppositions forming its central axis. Men, associated with the gods, purity, and the meat, blood and beer of sacrificial banquets, are represented as the backbone of the patriline. Women, by contrast, were fundamentally impure, or more precisely *sacra* in the old Latin sense of the word: on the one hand they were imagined as “chargé[es] d’une souillure ineffaçable” (Benveniste 1969: 187-192) and therefore a source of danger and pollution to

men; yet at the same time women were essential for the continuation of the lineage and for communication between the natural and supernatural worlds. This inescapable paradox found numerous reflections in the religious system of the Georgian mountaineers; the uncovering and structural analysis of this aspect of Pshav-Khevsur religion is one of the major contributions of Charachidzé's 1968 monograph. We will mention but one of the principal representations of female/male relations here: the paired deities Samdzimari and Giorgi (St. George). Samdzimari is portrayed as a demonic princess who was captured by St. George during a raid on the underground kingdom of the Kajis, a race of redoubtable metal-working demiurges with mysterious powers. After defeating the Kajis Giorgi returns with their wealth, metal-working tools, the chalices and drinking horns used for sacred banquets, and Samdzimari and her sisters. She is installed by Giorgi as his *d obili* ("sister-spouse", in Charachidzé's rendering), and the two of them are worshipped at one of the most sacred and powerful Khevsur shrines, Xaxmatis Jvari. It is on the periphery of this sanctuary that women undergo anointing with the blood of freshly-killed lambs. (We witnessed such a purification in the summer of 1996). Xaxmatis Jvari is also designated a "shrine for believers and unbelievers" [*rjulian-urjulo salotsavi*], that is, a place where both (nominally) Christian Georgians and (nominally) Muslim Chechens and Ingush traditionally came to sacrifice animals and beer on the occasion of the great summer festival of Atengenoba. The access granted to women and "unbelievers" at Xaxmatis Jvari derives from one of the central functions of the divine couple Samdzimari-Giorgi in the highland religious system. Like similar pairs of deities in other Central Caucasian communities, Samdzimari and Giorgi are associated with contrastive conceptions of the world outside the domesticated space of the village and its immediate surroundings. The various Caucasian avatars of St. George protect men who leave the village into to derive some profit from the riches of the exterior: hunters, woodcutters, even thieves (who raid cattle from adjacent tribes) [Mak'alatia 1935: 242]. Samdzimari, by contrast, is linked both with distant, inaccessible spaces — mountain peaks, impenetrable forests — and with the domestic hearth, the most 'interior' location there is. Legends trace her trajectory from the underworld to the hearth, and her flights back into nature. She thus symbolizes the movement of women through marriage, coming from

the outside, from an unrelated clan, to take their place at the very centre of their husbands' households. Both Samdzimari and Giorgi are associated with foreigners (one Khevsur text describes Giorgi appearing to his priests dressed in the costume of a Chechen), capturing as they do the two sides of relations with outside communities: potentially dangerous, yet necessary for survival.

Samdzimari and Giorgi are *dobili* and *dzmobili* ("sister-spouse" and "brother-spouse"), rather than wife and husband. Until recently these terms were also applied to human women and men, who had entered into a much-discussed, and much-misunderstood, premarital relationship called *sts'orproba* (in Khevsureti) or *ts'ats'loba* (in Pshavi). Two young people from the same community, sometimes even close relatives, could by mutual agreement form a special emotional bond, marked by the exchange of gifts, poems and songs, and by physical closeness, although subject to one crucial restriction. The couple engaging in *ts'ats'loba* were strictly forbidden to marry, and any child born to them was regarded with horror as the offspring of an incestuous union. When the time came to marry, the young pair must separate. Pshav-Khevsur oral tradition includes many accounts of a young woman committing suicide when forced to give up her *dzmobili* to marry a man she scarcely knew, chosen by her parents. Other couples chose exile. Most, however, married outside the community, although maintaining a special friendship with their former *dobili* or *dzmobili*. Charachidzé [1968] referred to *ts'ats'loba* as an "anti-marriage", which indeed it is: as a mutually-chosen, symmetrical, endogamous relationship, it contrasts sharply with the traditional highland Caucasian institution of marriage. Evidence from the Svan language and folklore attest to the existence of some sort of "anti-marriage" in Proto-Kartvelian society (c. 4th millennium BC), representing a symbolic counterweight to the contradictions inherent in marriage, although it cannot be ascertained how closely it resembled 19th-century *ts'ats'loba* [Tuite 1997].

The most sacred place in a highland community is the site of the shrine, variously known as *jvari* ("cross"), *khat'i* ("icon") or *salotsavi* ("sanctuary"). The trajectory of Samdzimari finds a parallel in many *andrezebi* (shrine-foundation myths), in which a "outsider", woman or foreigner, is guided by the deity — usually represented as a shining bird-like object — to the site it has chosen for its dwelling (K'ik'nadze [1996, ms.]; the Chechens and Ingush

have similar legends [Nichols, ms]). The chosen place is invariably separated by some distance from the village, atop a mountain or within a forest. The spot where the deity is believed to have touched down becomes the most sacred site in the shrine complex, usually marked by a stone tower which can be approached only by the shrine officials. Radiating outward from this point are spaces of decreasing sanctity: the area (separated by a wall) offlimits to all save the priests; the area surrounding the shrine which men, but not women, may enter; and then the common space accessible to both sexes. At the opposite extreme are sites reserved for women during periods of blood flow, which are extremely polluting to men: the menstruation cabins (*samrelo*) at the edge of the village, and, a mile or more away, the rude hut where women give birth (*ḡachexi*). (In highland Georgia, as in some Melanesian societies, the blood shed at childbirth was regarded as more dangerous to men than menstrual blood).

The shrine (or rather shrines, each highland community having several at varying distances from the village) is tended by officials of various ranks and lengths of tenure. Chief among them are the priests (*xevsiberi*, *xucesi*) and oracles (*kadagi*), who are selected directly by the shrine's resident deity, and who serve for life. Priests and oracles generally receive their vocations while still quite young, often before adolescence, in the form of dreams and visions, illnesses (psychological or physical), or — especially when the candidate persists in resisting the call to service — a series of family tragedies. (One *xevsiberi* I interviewed in 1996 said he lost a half-dozen family members to accidents, illnesses and death in war before he accepted his vocation). The priests preside over the sacrificing of animals, bread and alcoholic beverages (traditionally beer), which they accept in the name of the shrine. They pronounce invocations of the deities, call upon them to favour the family making the offering with health, well-being and a good harvest, and supervise the slaughtering of the sacrificed beasts. The role of the oracle is in some respects more spectacular. The local deity was believed to speak through him, a mediating role assured by the goddess Samdzimari, who, according to legend, manifested herself as the nocturnal lover of celebrated oracles of the past. It is she whom the oracle invokes should it appear that he has lost contact with his deity [Charachidzé 1968: 511-12]. In contrast to the (male) oracle, whose link to the deity possessing him is established through the intervention of

Samdzimari, female mediums (*mesultane*, *meene*) who contact the souls of the dead do so directly, without the aid of a divine intermediary. (The assignment of this role to women is consistent with the attribution of 'impurity' to the dead. Priests, for example, avoid all contact with corpses, and will not visit the home of a recently-bereaved family until purification rituals have been performed [Baliauri & Mak'alatia 1940; Giorgadze 1981, 1987; K'op'aleishvili 1987]).

Summing up his analysis of highland Georgian religion, Charachidzé trenchantly observed that "si l'on demandait de définir le plus laconiquement possible la culture pshav-xevsur, il faudrait dire : *ts'ats'loba etkadagoba*" [1968: 113]. He sensed, correctly I believe, that these two institutions lay at the heart of Pshav-Khevsurian ideology as it was observed at the turn of the century. The relation between *dobili* and *dzmobili*, like that between an oracle and the god for whom he speaks, are both fundamentally individualities (unlike marriage, which is contracted between families), and — here my analysis departs somewhat from Charachidzé's — grounded in the "horizontal" orientation of Central Caucasian social ideology. The circular trajectory of Samdzimari, and that of women in their double role as wives (coming from the exterior to the interior) and as *ts'ats'ali* (from the interior to the exterior), are two of the multiple reflections of an ideological apparatus concerned with confronting, and overcoming, men's fears of the foreign and 'other' in order to ensure the survival of the community.

The description given here is based almost entirely upon data collected in the Georgian provinces of Pshavi and Khevsureti. Published accounts concerning the pre-Soviet cultures of the neighbouring non-Georgian highlanders (Chechens and Ingush, Ossetes, Daghestanians) are far less numerous and generally less detailed. Some of this is due, quite simply, to the greater success of North Caucasian Islam — and of the Sufi brotherhoods in particular — in eradicating or transmuting pre-Islamic religious beliefs and practices, compared to Georgian Christianity on its side of the mountains. During our previous excursions in the region, however, we had the opportunity to visit the P'ank'isi Valley in eastern Georgia, inhabited by the Chechen-speaking Kist'is, many of whom are descended from families who left Chechnia before the implantation of Islam in the highlands. Interviews with Kist'is

recorded in 1997 leave me optimistic that much valuable information remains to be gleaned from them concerning the pre-Islamic beliefs of the Wainakh (Chechen and Ingush) people.

(b) *The Soviet period.* Within a few years of the Soviet takeover of Georgia in 1921, attempts were made, more often than not in heavy-handed manner, to “fight against harmful traditions and customs” in the highlands. Shrines and icons were desecrated, priests arrested, menstruation huts torn down; local authorities strove to put an end to bloodfeuds, cattle raiding and the abduction of brides. At the same time infrastructural improvements brought schools, roads and a cash economy to at least the more accessible mountain communities. But during World War II and the decade following, matters took a drastic turn. The expulsion of the Chechen, Ingush, Karachay and Balkar peoples to Central Asia in the waning years of the war was, it is now becoming clear, the first phase of an operation intended to empty the Central Caucasus of most of its indigenous populations. The deportation of the Chechens and Ingush set in motion a sequence of forced relocations which, since they took place within the Russian or Georgian republics, never received much attention outside the USSR. In the North Caucasus, Daghestanian mountain communities were forceably resettled in lowland Chechnia, where many perished due to the increased warmth, humidity and unfamiliar diet. In Georgia, a number of highland communities were resettled. Perhaps the most dramatic such incident took place in 1951-1952, when the entire population of Khevsureti, with the exception of the southermost village of Barisaxo, was relocated to the lowlands of southeastern Georgia, near the Azeri border. Those who did not voluntarily leave were forced at gunpoint. Militiamen were stationed along the roads to prevent anyone from returning. Many older people preferred to take their own lives rather than abandon their homes. As in Daghestan, those that did relocate underwent a difficult adaptation to semi-desert conditions, with much illness and loss of life. Beginning in the 1960’s individual Khevsurs began resettling illegally in their natal villages, and in 1983 the Georgian Soviet authorities admitted that the forced depopulation of Khevsureti had “negative social and economic consequences”. Although many villagers had returned by this time, Schybol [1994] estimates the current population of Khevsureti at around 800, less than a third of what it was a century and a half ago [Eristov 1853]. Many of these continue to hold jobs

or attend school in the lowlands, and only spend summers in Khevsureti.

One Khevsur I interviewed described how his brother returned illegally to his village in the 1960's, and resumed officiating at the shrine where his father had been priest before the expulsion. Similar cases occurred elsewhere. But even though much of the old religion appeared to have survived intact — the shrines, sacrifices, rituals, many of the beliefs concerning purity and pollution — key elements had been irreversibly altered. The relation of *ts'ats'loba*, already a source of embarrassment and defensiveness to many mountaineers in the 1910's and 20's, appears to have died out in the 50's. The role of oracle (*kadagoba*) suffered a similar fate. A second Khevsur consultant described the death by suicide, around 1960, of the last oracle of the village Blo, who became convinced that his "angel" had abandoned him after he left Khevsureti for the lowlands. (Oracles, even more than priests, were obliged to maintain a high level of ritual purity, and to remain close to their shrines. Lowland villages, with their impure livestock — pigs and poultry — and relative permeability to urban influences, were seen by many traditional Georgian mountaineers as a source of pollution). He straightaway returned to his home in Blo, and shot himself a few days later. To my knowledge the last old-style Khevsur *kadagi* died in the early 1990's, in the village of Gudani. Menstruation and childbirth huts have not existed since the expulsions, nor are traditional costumes (*t'alavari*) worn, save by a few self-conscious traditionalists at festivals.

(c) *The post-Soviet period.* On the basis of the preceding observations, it would appear that Georgian highland religion is changing (or dying?) from the inside out. It is precisely the two elements that represented for Charachidzé the essence of Pshav-Khevsur culture, that proved to be the most fragile, even as much else remained relatively unchanged. One of the principal questions guiding our fieldwork in post-Soviet Georgia has been to assess the nature of this apparent void at the heart of the religious system, to attempt to find out what, if anything, will take its place, and what impact these ideological changes will have upon relations between ethnic groups, and between the sexes.

The break-up of the USSR has been followed by civil wars, ethnic conflicts, marauding bands of gunmen, displaced refugees, economic and infrastructural disruption. Chechnia was devastated

by war with Russia. Cities such as Tbilisi have been hard hit by shortages of electricity, heating oil, and fuel; deteriorating roads; and a sharp rise in criminality and drug abuse. One result of the latter state of affairs has been a renewed reliance by city-dwellers on their country cousins for foodstuffs in short supply in the cities, and for lodging and work, especially during the heatless, electricity-less winters. Yet at the same time, due to poor roads and lack of fuel, access to remoter areas such as Pshavi and Khevsureti has become more difficult. Despite the infrastructure-related impediments to contact, the new importations from the West appearing with increasing ubiquity in the city centres of the newly-independent republics have been percolating steadily upland. In addition to the occasional Michael Jordan jersey spotted at highland festivals, new religions are making their impact felt. Last year I was told that a significant number of villagers in the remote Khevsurian community of Ardot's Xeoba — including some members of the priest's family — had become Jehovah's Witnesses (a religion that has likewise made surprising inroads among marginalized lowland Georgians in the 1990's). In Daghestan and Chechnia, an Islamic revival movement denounced in the press as "Wahhabism" has met with the vigorous opposition of both official Islam (i.e. those institutions allowed to function under Communism) and local governments.

In this turbulent period of rapid, even vertiginous, economic, social and cultural change, it is important to continue monitoring the religious beliefs and activities of the Central Caucasian highlanders, despite their remoteness from what one would ordinarily consider the centres of innovation. Our observations of the past three years point toward a number of potential scenarios:

- (a) The rapid spread of new sects at the expense of both the old religion and of Georgian Orthodoxy in all or most of the highlands.
- (b) A restructuring of the highland religious system under the influence of the (relatively viable) syncretic religion of the east Georgian lowlands, especially those communities settled in previous centuries by out-migrating mountaineers. Women play a far more prominent role in lowland shrine festivals, some even functioning as oracles or seers. Highland priests we interviewed have mixed feelings (at best) about the participation of female oracles at their shrines, but the next generation of shrine officials — who will almost certainly have spent a good portion of their childhood in the lowlands

— may be more accommodating. (c) A conscious, folklorizing revival of the old religion — or of some of its external trappings, in any event — by young Georgians seeking to affirm their difference from the great cultural and economic powers surrounding them on all sides (especially from Russia, which has the same state religion as Georgia), or who believe that official Georgian Orthodoxy has been too thoroughly comprised by seventy years of uneasy cohabitation with Communism. Most likely all of the above, as well as outcomes not foreseeable at present, will come to pass to varying degrees.

3. **METHODOLOGY.** The project will be organized around the three summer field trips, each lasting about two months, which will coincide with the major feast days in the highland liturgical year. The shrine festivals and interviews with participants will be recorded on Hi-8 video cassettes. While in the Caucasus, the principal investigator will revisit the Chechen communities in Georgia, and — if conditions permit — highland villages in the North Caucasus. (I am fluent in Georgian and have a good command of Russian, these being the two *lingue franche* in use in the Central Caucasus). In addition to interviews and filming of festivals, I will visit libraries and folklore archives and consult with colleagues at Tbilisi State University, and the Georgian Academy of Sciences. Since the fall of Communism and subsequent troubles, foreigner researchers have by and large stayed away, and only a handful of Georgian scholars have been able to afford the (for them) considerable sums needed for fieldwork. On previous trips to the highlands I have been accompanied by young Georgian ethnologists who could not afford the costs of hiring a jeep on their salaries (rarely more than \$40-50 / month). They have in return provided invaluable help in making contacts with shrine officials and analysis of data. I plan to continue this practice of collaboration with local scholars both in the city and in the field. The starting points for the analysis of the data to be gathered have been discussed in the preceding section. Unlike nearly all previous studies, which have focused on the pantheon [Bardavelidze], gender [Charachidzé], or the relationship between highland ‘paganism’ and Orthodoxy [K’ik’nadze], the planned study will examine the symbolization of interior and exterior space, and its reflection in relations between the sexes, and with outsiders. Although the primary focus will be upon tracking the changes Central Caucasian religion has been undergoing since the Soviet

period, attention will be given to the uncovering of facts which will aid in diachronic work at far longer time depths, both for the purpose of building upon the work of Bardavelidze, Charachidze and others on prehistoric Caucasian religion, as well as for comparison with ancient Near Eastern, Indo-European and Anatolian religions. In conclusion, I wish to emphasize the unique opportunity we have to record what remains of one of the last relatively coherent “pagan” religious systems in Europe, during what promises to be radical transformation of its structure.

4. COMMUNICATION OF RESULTS. As was the case with the previous project, results will be communicated to colleagues in both the West and in Georgia through journal publications, conference papers, and, should I be invited to do so, interviews in the Georgian media. Prof. Zurab K'ik'nadze of the folklore department of Tbilisi State University has collected a sizeable corpus of Georgian shrine-foundation myths, and has offered to work with me on an annotated translation of them, which we would submit for publication in the West. One key objective of the project is the video recording of shrine ceremonies and interviews. The principal subjects of the videotaping will be the summer festival of Atengenoba at various shrines (in late June to early July), and, for purposes of comparison, the important lowland east Georgian festival of Alaverdoba (in September). We also intend to tape interviews and other material concerning the career and legacy of the late Bich'uri Badrishvili.

A11. Summary of project.

The remarkable religious system of the mountaineers of the Central Caucasus, with its imbedding of Christian symbols and saints in a distinctly non-Christian matrix, has attracted the attention of ethnologists and folklorists since the mid-19th century. The classic descriptions of the traditional religious system of the Khevsur and Pshav mountaineers of Northeast Georgia, as well as those of their Chechen-Ingush and Ossetian neighbours are based on ethnographic data from the period of roughly 1850 to just before World War II. Little has been published concerning the more recent state of this religious system, except for G. Charachidzé's gloomy pronouncement in 1968 that it “a sombre toute entière voici bien tôt trente ans, ne laissant derrière elle que de faibles remous vite

disparus” [1968: 717]. Is this assessment accurate? As analyzed by Charachidzé, the data in the prewar ethnographic corpus is the output of an internally-consistent, rigorously binary cultural grammar, shared, with local variations, by the Pshavs, Khevsurs and their neighbors up until the beginning of this century. On one side are men, beer, purity/holiness (*sic mide*) and the gods; on the other are women, butter, impurity and the dead. Much of the ideological apparatus is involved in overcoming the fundamental paradox a system of this type must necessarily confront: assuring the continuity of the patrilineage through union with dangerous, impure women. Paired female and male deities, and the institution of *ts'ats'loba* (a premarital relation between girls and boys from the same community), play a key role in transcending the contradiction. Many ethnologists appear to share an unspoken assumption that the crystalline rigidity characterising cultural grammars of this sort dooms them to fragility. Radical changes to the social environment — particularly those compromising the authority of traditional ideological watchdogs — are likely to bring the whole architecture crashing down. The Soviet period brought universal education, improved roads, collectivization and a money economy to the Georgian highlands. Antireligious activists tore down menstruation huts and shrines. The net loss of population, already a matter of alarm to writers in the 20's and 30's, increased in tempo as more and more mountaineers moved — or were expelled by the authorities — to villages in the East Georgian lowlands, or to the capital. And indeed, the religious system of the Georgian highlanders has been fundamentally altered by the changes mentioned here, and no doubt many others besides. But it is in far better health than Charachidzé's assessment of thirty years ago would lead one to believe, as we ourselves discovered when we visited Pshavi and Khevsureti in the summers of 1996 and 1997..

The primary objectives of the proposed project are:

(1) *Synchronic analysis*: The description and study of the religious beliefs and practices of the Northeast Georgian highlanders, and, for comparative purposes, those of their Wainakh (Chechen, Ingush, Kisti), Ossetian and lowland Georgian neighbours, in the post-Soviet period. Among the aspects of the

problem to be examined are: (a) the changes in the belief system since pre-Soviet times; (b) the ways in which beliefs and practices are passed on to the younger generations, especially those who live quasi-permanently in the lowlands; (c) attitudes toward the traditional belief system and way of life among various segments of the population (by age, sex, residence, occupation, etc.); (d) degree and manner of participation in rituals and ceremonies by different segments of the population. Special attention will be given to the study of representations of the spatial opposition between interior and exterior in the religious system and social ideology, as reflected in the structuring of the pantheon, rituals, prayers and myths, attitudes toward the outside world (and toward foreigners in particular), and relations between the sexes.

(2) *Longitudinal study*: In the course of the next several years, we wish to continue collecting texts and biographical materials concerning the life and career of Bich'uri Badrishvili, a priest (*xevsiberi*) from the Georgian province of Pshavi who died at the age of 108 in 1981. Badrishvili was the last surviving priest to have been trained and consecrated in the traditional highland religion of pre-Soviet times, and many priests now serving were appointed by him. We will compare the biographical data on Badrishvili with recordings, interviews and observations of his successors at the shrines of Iremtk'alo, Iaqsari, Lashara and Tamar-Ghele, with the aim of evaluating continuity and change in highland religious practices. If the opportunity presents itself, we hope to observe the selection and installation of new priests.

(3) *Historical analysis*: On the basis of contemporary and documentary evidence, what can be inferred about the Central Caucasian cultural area at various stages in its past? What can be learned about the nature and intensity of contacts — cultural, economic, migrational, etc. — between the highlands and lowlands, and between the North and South Caucasus? How do beliefs, motif clusters (e.g. in myths), elements of social ideology, etc., characteristic of the Central Caucasus compare, or contrast, with corresponding elements from the early Indo-European, Near Eastern, and Circumpontic cultural areas?

ქვემოთ მოხსენიებული,
პაატა ბუხრაშვილი.

კავკასიოლოგიის საქართველოს სამეცნიერო-
კვლევითი საზოგადოებრივი ინსტიტუტის
1996 - 2001 მუშაობის მოკლე ანბარი

1996-2001 განმავლობაში ფშავ-ხევსურეთში მოგვიწია სავსე მასალის შესაგროვებლად მივლინება. ჩვენს მიერ უძილაურთას, გოგოლაურთას და სხვა მათ მსგავს თემებში დადასტურდა მოსახლეობის ყოფაში მძლავრად მოქმედი ტრადიციული სათემო სალოცავების არსებობა, რომლებიც თავის მხრივ დიდად განაპირობებენ მის „ყმათა“ ყოველდღიურ ცხოვრებას და მძლავრად არიან ფესვადგმულნი აღმ.საქართველოს მთიანეთის მოსახლეობის ცნობიერებში. მიუხედავად საბჭოთა პერიოდში ოფიციალური მხრიდან წარმართული მძლავრი ანტირელიგიური პროპაგანდისა, ამ სალოცავებს მაინც არ დაუკარგავთ საკუთარი მნიშვნელობა და მათი მეშვეობით (კერძოდ კი „ხვეისბერების“ საშუალებით) რეგულირდება ამ მხარეში მცხოვრები მოსახლეობის მთელი რიგი უმნიშვნელოვანესი ყოფითი საკითხები. მათი ერგულნი მაჟამადაც არიან ამ მხარიდან ძალდატანებით თუ საკუთარი ნებით გადასახლებულ მთელითა თაობები.

მიუხედავად იმის, რომ ქართველ ეთნოგრაფთა და ფოლკლორისტთა (ვ.ბარდაველიძე, გ. ჩიტაია, ჟ.ერიაშვილი, ზ.კიკნაძე, ტ. მახაური, რ. დოლიძე და სხვანი) მიერ ხდებოდა ხვეისბერის ინსტიტუტის შესახებ მასალათა მოძიება, ჯერჯერობით ეს ტრადიციული ინსტიტუტი არ გამხდარა ჯეროვანი, თამამედროვე მეთოდოლოგიურ პრინციპებზე აგებული კვლევის საგანი.

მიგვაჩნია, რომ ამ სათემო ინსტიტუტების – სათემო სალოცავების, თეოკრატიული და სამართლებლივი სტრუქტურის ჯეროვანი შესწავლა და კვლევის შედეგების აუცილებელი გათვალისწინება თამამედროვე სამოქალაქო-ადმინისტრაციული საკითხების გადაწყვეტაში, თავიდან აგვაცილებს იმ ორგვარ სტანდარტებს, რომელთაც მრავლად ვაწყდებით არა მართო აღმ. საქართველოს მთიელთა, არამედ ზოგადად კავკასიის რეგიონის

მოსახლეობის ტრადიციული ცხოვრების წესით მძლავრად გაჯერებულ თანამედროვე ყოფაში; კერძოდ კი დაძლეულ იქნება ის საჩოთირო მდგომარეობა, როცა ცალკ-ცალკე, ერთმანეთისგან დამოუკიდებლად არსებობენ (და საკმაოდ ხშირ შემთხვევაში, ერთიმეორეს ეწინააღმდეგებიან კიდევ...) აღმ.საქართველოს მოსახლეობაში ფესვგადგმული ტრადიციული ადმინისტრაციულ-სამართლებრივი ნორმები და ოფიციალურად მოქმედი, სამართლებრივ-ადმინისტრაციული კანონთა სისტემა.

ძირითადი სამუშაო წარიმართა ფშავ-ხევსურეთის შემდგომ თემებსა და საკულტო ცენტრებში: მადაროსკარში, შუაფხოში, მუქოში, მათურაში, ლაშარის ჯვარსა და თამარღელეში, ატაბეში, როშკაში, ხანმატსა და შატილში.