

FROM THE HISTORY OF THE GEORGIAN MARITIME FLEET

(based on archival documentary materials preserved in the archive administration)

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Abstract: In Georgia, navigation has a long history. Numerous works of Georgian and foreign scientists were dedicated to this issue. After Russia's conquest of the Georgian coast of the Black Sea, the foundation for the development of long-distance navigation was laid, a Russian maritime-commercial fleet was created, and the restoration and expansion of the maritime routes connecting Europe and Asia began. From 1921, the Batumi port was militarized. At the Batumi port, there existed a Special Administration of the Seas of Transcaucasia, which carried out ship registration and document inspection. Internationally significant conventions ensured the peaceful movement of ships on the Black Sea and the safety of sailors' lives. Technical requirements were established for all types of maritime transport. Ships were equipped with high-standard radios and warning acoustic signaling systems. All types of hazards, including fire, ship collisions, etc., were considered in the existing convention. The commercial department of the Black Sea coastal fleet had a schedule, calculated in hours and minutes, for incoming and outgoing ships at the Batumi port. Between 1967 and 1974, ships visited ports in 75 foreign countries. Georgia's maritime navigation was being established from scratch; it had no fleet, lacked necessary material-technical bases, transport management, and personnel. In 1969, 386 ships entered the Batumi port under foreign flags (Bulgaria, Italy, Greece, India, Poland, Finland, Norway, Yugoslavia, Cyprus, Denmark, Spain, Romania, Mexico, etc.). Petroleum products, fruits and vegetables, and metals were imported. By 1973, Georgia's maritime navigation had 40 tankers with a total tonnage of 395. In 1977, foreign currency earnings amounted to 155 thousand manats. On January 8, 1973, Batumi port was recognized as the best among the ports of the Black Sea.

Keywords: Batumi port, long-distance navigation, cabotage, commercial cargo turnover, foreign currency profit.

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From ancient times, Georgia had excellent traditions of navigation. Numerous works on this issue were dedicated by researcher-scientists A. Beradze, R. Uzunadze, T. Chanturia, R. Beridze, K. Nakashidze, and others. The newly established maritime leadership faced the task of reviving and developing the ancient navigation traditions and training and developing the workers of the maritime fleet.

After Russia's conquest of the Georgian coast of the Black Sea, the foundation for the development of long-distance navigation was laid, a Russian maritime-commercial fleet was created, and the restoration and expansion of the maritime routes connecting Europe and Asia began. The Rioni River, connecting to the Black Sea, served the function of navigation within the country. (Goderdzi Vachridze 2013:59)

From 1921, the Batumi port was militarized. Cargo inspection was carried out by a commission that included the Batumi commandant, the port captain, and the head of the port detachment. Based on the

inspection of sailing and motorized ships, an act was drawn up. On August 10, 1921, in the Batumi port, 400 barrels of gasoline were delivered by the motorized ship „Kibalchichi“ (Captain Grishko) (Archive, F. R-296, An. 1 S. 9, Sheet 2).

At the Batumi port, there existed a Special Administration of the Seas of Transcaucasia, which carried out ship registration and document inspection. Strict military rules were established at the Batumi port. On September 8, 1921, the ship „Chorokhi,“ which was stopped at the Ochamchire maritime port, was transporting tobacco intended for the army, and at that time, the ship's captain received an urgent order to proceed to the port of Sokhumi. The ship's captain was obliged to comply with the order; otherwise, he faced imprisonment and a fine. In cases of non-compliance with the established port laws, the cargo owner was fined. In 1921, the company „Lloyd Trust“ was fined ten million manats (bonds). The security of the Batumi port was ensured by a militarized police detachment.

Internationally significant conventions ensured the peaceful movement of ships on the Black Sea and the safety of sailors' lives. Technical requirements were established for all types of maritime transport. Ships were equipped with high-standard radios and warning acoustic signaling systems. All types of hazards, including fire, ship collisions, etc., were considered in the existing conventions. In 1974, a collision was recorded between the steamship „Mikha Tskhakaya“ (Captain Zeneishvili) and a Canadian dry cargo ship. The main reason was named as the formal nature of ship inspections. In 1974, the steamship „Zugdidi“ was inspected formally, and no remarks were recorded in the journal. Often, emergency incidents were concealed. Sailors underwent training on a radar simulator. Georgia's maritime fleet ships carried out numerous voyages throughout the year.

The commercial department of the Black Sea coastal fleet had a schedule, calculated in hours and minutes, for incoming and outgoing ships at the Batumi port. The times of entry and exit from different ports were determined. Ships departing from Batumi passenger through the ports of Poti, Gagra, Sokhumi, Sochi, Yalta, Tuapse, Anapa, and Novorossiysk. Different schedules were established for summer voyages. Cargo and passenger ships traveled from Batumi in the direction of Anatolia (the Asian side of Turkey). Once a year, free passenger transportation was provided for personnel serving at sea. On the Black Sea coast, three regiments, the Caucasus division, one company, and two squadrons were stationed. (Archive, F. R-296, An. 1 S. 23, Sheet 60).

The Georgian Maritime Fleet was officially established on January 20, 1967, by Order N13 of the USSR Ministry of the Maritime Fleet, preceded by a long preparatory period. Its creation was prompted by many reasons. At that time, the Black Sea maritime fleet served as a central hub for passenger and cargo ships in the Novorossiysk region and was heavily overloaded with freight operations. To reduce this burden, it was necessary to create a separate maritime fleet. Additionally, the Ministry of the Maritime Fleet considered the significant increase in import-export goods passenger through ports in Georgia, with cargo being sent worldwide. One of the main goals of establishing the Georgian Maritime Fleet was to address operationally the transportation of passengers and cargo. The Georgian Maritime Fleet was directly subordinated to the USSR Maritime Fleet, with its main headquarters located in the city of Batumi.

By the decree of the Georgian government on February 17, 1967, the fleet was allocated the building at 40 I. Gogebashvili Street in Batumi and 1.4 hectares of land, previously belonging to the fishing enterprise „Red Fisherman.“

The leading personnel and engineering-technical staff of the Georgian Maritime Fleet were Assigned to the third category based on wages. The ports of Batumi, Poti, and Sokhumi were allocated one telephone line and an additional 100 telephone numbers. The government allocated 50,000 manats for the restoration of buildings and facilities Assigned to the fleet. The fleet was equipped with new technical equipment. On the initiative of G. Chagovadze, Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers of Georgia, vocational schools for maritime professions were opened in Batumi, Poti, and Sokhumi from the 1967–68 academic year. In Poti, a training-course combinat was also established. (Archive, F. R-128, S. 1, Sheet 47).

By Order №123 of the USSR Maritime Fleet on June 24, 1967, the Georgian Maritime Fleet was allocated the following ships: „Aksai“ (cargo capacity 3800 t), „Alagiri“, „Aktash“, „Anapa“, „Alekseevka“, „Aktau“, „Kirov“, „Klaipeda“, „Iziaslav“, and „Maikopi.“ The transfer of ships was carried out based on an agreement between the Novorossiysk and Georgian Maritime Fleets. During 1967–1968, other ships under the Georgian Maritime Fleet included: „Poti“, „Tbilisi“, and „26 Commissars.“ Minor cabotage routes were primarily in the Batumi-Odesa and Batumi-Zhdanov directions, while the large-scale fleet operated in the Patagon-Shelf-Odesa, Sevastopol-Feodosia-Montevideo, Patagon-Shelf-Batumi, and Kaliningrad-Patagon-Shelf regions. During this period, international voyages included Batumi-Iceland, Tuapse-Canakkale, Feodosia-Antwerp, Buenos Aires-Illichevsk, and Constanta-Hamburg-Rotterdam routes. In 1967–1968, a total of 75,645 tons of cargo were transported, yielding a net profit in foreign currency of 159,503 manats. (Archive, F. R-128, S. 33, Sheet 136)

In 1973, the tanker „Drogobichi“ (Captain I.M. Shanidze) completed 33 voyages, 5 of which were abroad, achieving 100% of the annual plan. Net foreign currency earnings amounted to 121,800 manats. (Archive, F. R-128, An. 1 S. 553, Sheet 143)

In 1967, the Poti port processed 2,860 tons of cargo, including: 1. Flour 261 (grain 240); 2. Sugar 60 (raw sugar 50); 3. Cotton 65; 4. Metals 280; 5. Ore 1,406; 6. Coal 610; 7. Construction materials 125; 8. Chemical cargo 15; 9. General cargo 36.

From 1966 to 1970, the volume of export-import goods in Poti port increased one – to twofold.

In the report of the Head of Batumi Maritime Port, Boris Antimosi dze Lomtadze, on the port's activities from 1966–1970, the growth indicators of export-import goods and the increase in cargo turnover are clearly visible. A similar situation is reported by R. Eshba, head of the Sokhumi port.

On April 29, 1967, based on Order N78 issued by the Director of the Georgian Maritime Fleet, A. Kacharava, special attention was paid to the efficient use of the port fleet, the introduction of the latest scientific and technical achievements at the port, modernization of existing facilities, improving the qualifications of personnel working in the port fleet, and so on. (Archive, F. R-128, S. 4, Sheets 61–62)

By Order N34 of March 31, 1967, issued by the Head of the Georgian Maritime Fleet, Anatoli Kacharava, the rights and responsibilities among the fleet leadership were distributed as follows:

The Fleet Head directly oversaw the Council of the fleet, as well as the military-mobilization, legal, and financial departments, the main maritime agency „Inflot“, and the headquarters office „Maritime-Commercial Transport.“

His deputy in the field of port construction was B.A. Lomtadze, who was directly in charge of the military detachment „BOXP“, responsible for port security. He also controlled hydro-technical facilities, major repairs, proper operation of industrial buildings, the maritime agency „Transflot“, and construction of industrial and cultural-residential buildings in the port.

The Deputy Head for fleet cargo turnover and transportation, A. Nagnibedi, oversaw the commercial department, the military-defense staff, and the planned and organizational operations of the transport fleet.

The Chief Engineer of the fleet managed the economy, communications, electric-radio navigation, the radio center, material-technical support services, the design-construction bureau, thermal engineering, shipbuilding and repair, the fleet technical council, the chemical laboratory, and supervised the technical operation of dry cargo, oil tankers, coal, ore, and passenger-transport fleet.

The Deputy Head in navigation, V. Chkhaidze, directed the navigation service, the base electric-radio navigation station, port captains and pilots, and supervised the safety of all types of fleet ships.

The Deputy Head for economic affairs, E.A. Chernov, supervised the planning-economic and financial-currency departments, the normative research station, coordinated the work of the fleet council, and reported on directive materials issued by the council.

The Deputy Head for household affairs, D.G. Rtveladze, oversaw the administrative-economic department, was responsible for compliance with orders and directives issued by the fleet, supervised child care institutions at the port, club and sports activities, and port living and sanitary conditions.

The Deputy Head for personnel, E.S. Veresotski, managed the organizational department for sailors working abroad and supervised the work of personnel on fleet ships. (Archive, F. R-128, S. 4, Sheets 28–30)

The Georgian Maritime Fleet paid great attention to the training of engineering-technical personnel. For this purpose, the fleet maintained close contacts with various other maritime fleets. According to data from the Personnel Department of April 25, 1967, out of 35 specialists, 15 had higher education, 6 had incomplete higher education, 11 had specialized secondary education, and 3 had general secondary education. Knowledgeable maritime professionals included the long-distance navigation captain A. Kacharava, his deputy Boris Lomtadze, as well as V. Chkhaidze, N. Gaidaburi, A. Maksimov, E. Chernov, and others. Most of them had served for many years as captains and assistants in long-distance navigation.

The head of the personnel department, E.G. Gegenava, spent 20 years in long-distance navigation, holding first the position of engineer-mechanic and later the first assistant of a long-distance navigation captain. G. Vasadze, who supervised the organization of overseas navigation, held a long-distance navigation captain's diploma and worked for 11 years in the Ministry of the Maritime Fleet system.

To share labor experience, fleet specialists were sent to the Novorossiysk Maritime Fleet; seminars were held in Baltic countries, and the Batumi Maritime School (so-called „Morekhotka“) trained specialists for the fleet.

For the safety of export-import cargo transportation, based on the fleet head's order of February 19, 1967, militarized detachments of the Georgian Maritime Fleet, the so-called „BOXP,“ were created. (Archive, F. R-128, S. 4, Sheets 7–8)

On May 11, 1967, the Head of the Georgian Maritime Fleet established a uniform for maritime transport workers, based on the USSR Council of Ministers' order of March 22, 1963, and the Ministry of the Maritime Fleet's order of March 24, 1964.

At that time, the Georgian Maritime Fleet possessed the following transport assets:

Transport fleet: passenger catamarans „Zemchuzhina“ (2 units), „Arkadia“ (3 units);

Dry cargo barges and flatboats;

Tugboats (3 units), and others. The complete list is detailed in archival documents.

From 1959–1966, the passenger fleet of Sokhumi served the ships: „Sokhumi,“ „Dzigua,“ „Lakoba,“ „Kiakhba,“ „Eshba,“ „Tkvarcheli,“ „Abkhazia Komsomol,“ „Gali,“ „Ochamchire“; the cargo fleet served the ships: „Kodori,“ „Gumishta,“ „Kelasuri,“ „Bzipi.“ The Sokhumi Maritime Port Department was headed by M. Tsekava. (Archive, F. R-128, S. 30, Sheet 7)

On May 16, 1975, the Georgian Maritime Fleet Council discussed the rules of conduct for Soviet sailors abroad. Special attention on the ship was given to political-educational work. The second-in-command after the captain, the so-called „Zampalit,“ was the head of political-educational work. Particular control was established over the prevention of smuggling and adherence to customs regulations. A Soviet sailor was required to maintain moral conduct and follow the rules of behavior. Common violations included excessive alcohol consumption, lateness on the ship, trading with foreign citizens, and exchanging goods. Sailors who broke rules were deprived of visas and sent to work in cabotage for swimming duties. Trade items included women's perfume, exotic birds, pornographic magazines, foreign tobacco, and others. (Archive, F. R-128, An. 1 S. 622, Sheet 200)

The Georgian Maritime Fleet also implemented preventive measures against occupational diseases. Welders' occupational disease was conjunctivitis. Protective gloves were required, and work areas were isolated with protective barriers. (Archive, F. R-128, An. 1 S. 462, Sheet 52)

In the 1970s, members of the Georgian Maritime Fleet Council included A. Kacharava, P. Jorbenadze, Koiava, Kikvidze, Davidadze, Pkhakadze, Gaidaburi, Benidze, Isakaev, and Sidenko. (Archive, F. R-128, An. 1 S. 622, Sheet 290).

On February 14, 1974, the Head of the Georgian Maritime Fleet, Anatoli Kacharava, noted in his report that compared to 1972, cargo tonnage had increased by 20%, and profits amounted to 37%,

exceeding the plan by 9,000 maneti. The economy of the fleet exceeded 51,000 maneti. At the meeting, it was noted that the time for performing repair work had been reduced, delivery of new equipment had improved, and rationalization activities had developed. Anatoli Kacharava identified one of the main shortcomings as the long idle and waiting time of ships in maritime ports.

On September 19, 1973, the tanker „Borjomi,“ arriving at the port of Batumi, took 37 days to unload 21,000 tons of grain, instead of the planned 15 days. The main reason cited was the low qualification of the dispatcher. Large sums were spent on ship repair work; in 1973, 200,000 maneti were allocated for the overhaul of the tanker „Tbilisi,“ but 500,000 maneti were actually spent. In 1974, through staff reduction, the fleet achieved an economic effect of 6,500 maneti. (Archive, F. R-128, An. 1 S. 491, Sheet 146)

Based on Order of February 8, 1974, by Anatoli Kacharava, captains were appointed for ships sailing abroad: the tanker „Aspindza“ (Captain Aslan Yusufis dze), „Aktau“ (Captain Zenayishvili Abesalom Melitonis dze), „Aksai“ (Captain Blagidze Konstantine Konstantines dze). Notable Georgian captains included: Svanidze Giorgi Nikolozis dze, Mikeladze Soso Memedis dze, and Chkhaidze Vakhtang Davitis dze. (Archive, F. R-128, An. 1 S. 553, Sheet 6)

By Order of July 19, 1974, the Head of the Georgian Maritime Fleet awarded the honorary title of sailor to Marlen Oragvelidze and Giorgi Arjevanidze. The title of best captain was given to the captain of the tanker „Batumi,“ Vakhtang Davitis dze Chkhaidze; the captain of the tanker „Aspindza,“ Jumber Isidores dze Inchkireli. The title of best mechanic was awarded to Guram Shalvas dze Makatsaria, mechanic of the tanker „Zugdidi.“ Honorary titles were also given to: the senior officer of the tanker „Gori,“ Deisadze Nikoloz Ivanis dze; the boatswain of the tanker „50 Years of Soviet Georgia,“ Kutaladze Vazha Giorgis dze; and the sailor of the „Aktau,“ Mekvabishvili Guram Sandros dze.

From 1967 to 1974, Georgian Maritime Fleet ships visited ports in 75 foreign countries. The Georgian Maritime Fleet was created from scratch; it had no fleet, no necessary material-technical base, no transport economy, and no personnel.

In 1969, 386 foreign-flagged ships arrived at the Batumi Maritime Port (from Bulgaria, Italy, Greece, India, Poland, Finland, Norway, Yugoslavia, Cyprus, Denmark, Spain, Romania, Mexico, etc.). Cargo included petroleum products, fruits and vegetables, and metals.

By 1973, the Georgian Maritime Fleet had 40 tankers with a total tonnage of 395. In 1977, foreign currency profits reached 155,000 maneti, compared to 175,000 maneti in 1970, a fivefold increase.

In 1972, the fleet received the cargo ship „Niko Nikoladze“ for transporting useful minerals. Notable dry cargo ships included „Mikha Chkhaika“ and „Filipe Makharadze,“ which carried 30,000 tons of cargo, including wheat, coal, and coke. In 1975, the fleet included 52 ships with a total tonnage of 8,000.

In 1972, the fleet received the tanker „Drogobich“ from Bulgaria and „Aspindza“ from Finland. Notable ships included the tankers „Batumi,“ „Chkalov,“ „Mashtag,“ and „Iziaslav.“ The technical maintenance of the merchant fleet developed, ships were converted to automated systems, and 3,000 people worked in the Georgian Maritime Fleet. Each year, 350 passenger ships arrived at the Batumi port. In 1972, 18,900 passengers arrived in Georgia. Exports from Georgia included manganese (Chiatura), coke (Rustavi), and coal (Zestafoni), supplying metallurgical factories with raw materials.

In 1973, the ship „Anaklia“ traveled to Cuba, staying there for 153 days. It completed 34 voyages, transporting 162,410.951 kg of cargo, including 9,000 tons of oil and 7,000 tons of diesel fuel. The Georgian state earned 200,000 maneti in foreign currency and 300,000 maneti in Soviet rubles. The „Anaklia“ crew consisted of 36 people: 17 Georgians, 13 Russians, 2 Armenians, 1 Ukrainian, 1 Belarusian, and 1 Greek. The average age of the crew was 36, including graduates of higher maritime schools and specialists from technical colleges. (Archive, F. R-128, An. 1 S. 478, Sheet 1)

On July 31, 1972, the Georgian Maritime Fleet tanker „Adigeni“ traveled to Cuba for six months, with a crew of 37 members. The ship completed voyages to Rotterdam and Antwerp. (Archive, F. R-128, An. 1 S. 490, Sheet 21)

On January 8, 1973, the Batumi port was recognized as the best among the Black Sea ports. (Archive, F. R-128, An. 1 S. 122, Sheet 212)

Even this small sample of archival documentary material clearly illustrates the Georgian Maritime Fleet, which possessed a rich tradition of long-distance navigation, and provided significant monetary profit not only for Georgia but for the multiethnic Soviet state with a population of 260 million. The heroic achievements of Georgian long-distance navigation captains, such as A. Kacharava, A. Zenayishvili, V. Makatsaria, V. Chanturia, and others, became legendary. Unfortunately, today the Georgian Maritime Fleet, destroyed by Georgian hands, no longer exists, and the traditions of Georgian navigation have been forgotten.

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