

# BLACK SEA COAST - THE SETTLEMENT AREA OF PROTO-GEORGIAN TRIBES

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**Abstract:** Ancient (Greco-Roman) texts and epigraphic materials represent an extremely important source for studying the history of ancient Colchis, Lazica, and Iberia, as the Caucasus region was first identified precisely in these Ancient sources.

We intend to reconstruct the historical-geographical space of the present-day Autonomous Republic of Adjara based on information provided by Greco-Roman sources. Our study will focus on the distribution and interrelation of parallel toponyms and ethnonyms, their identification, and onomastic analysis. Additionally, we aim to develop normative recommendations for certain toponyms, determine their Georgian equivalents, and explore the motivation behind the naming of geographical locations. Furthermore, we will illustrate how borders have changed over time, particularly the boundary that, according to Ancient sources, also represented the division between Europe and Asia. Regarding the chronological boundaries, the earliest period we consider is that of Homer's poems (*Iliad*, *Odyssey* – 1st millennium BC), while the later boundary is the Late Antique period, approximately the first half of the 6th century AD.

The innovative aspect of this research lies in the fact that the Adjara region has not previously been studied from this perspective as an independent subject. Based on the analysis of data from individual ancient authors, we also plan to create hypothetical reconstructions of conditional maps and supplement the collected information with corresponding cartographic materials.

The study and systematization of Adjara region toponyms in this form inherently suggest perspectives for further research and expansion of the study area. In the future, we intend to continue working in this direction and conduct research on toponymy across the entire territory of Georgia using the aforementioned methodology.

**Keywords:** Onomastics of the Adjara Region; Ancient sources; toponyms and ethnonyms; onomastic analysis.

**Introduction:** Border regions have always been subjects of special interest, as the movement of people and the alternation of toponyms and ethnonyms in these areas give rise to many pressing and controversial issues. In such cases, the study of onomastic material is of particular importance for better understanding historical events and ethnographic processes. Observing toponyms helps us determine how a specific region has changed over time and how various cultures and languages have influenced it, as toponyms are more stable than common nouns. They are passed down from generation to generation, often enduring for centuries, firmly preserving ancient lexical units, roots, semantics, notable linguistic phenomena, as well as substrate and borrowed elements. At the same time, they provide highly valuable (often invaluable) information about the history and culture of the ethnic groups inhabiting a given territory. Accordingly, the study of Ancient sources in this direction will allow us to trace the dynamics of tribal movements in the territory of our interest.

The Ancient sources and epigraphic material that have enriched our knowledge of Georgia's distant past have been well-studied, translated, and published by various scholars (A. Urushadze, „*Ancient Colchis in the legend of the Argonauts*“; T. Kaukhchishvili, „*History of Georgia in Ancient Greek Sources*“; T. Kaukhchishvili, „*Georgian Corpus of Greek Inscriptions*“, Vols. I-III; *Caucasus antiquus: Encyclopedic Disciplina*, Vol. 1-5; N. Piphia, E. Kobakhidze, T. Dundua, „*Greek-Latin Inscriptions of the Classical Period as a Source for the History of Georgia*“ and others).

These texts have long been the subject of interest for Georgian scientists, philologists, historians, and archaeologists. However, it can be said that there is no comprehensive study where the toponyms and ethnonyms presented by ancient authors (both Greek – and Latin-speaking) are collected and analyzed from a chronological and onomastic perspective.

**Methods:** Each method is directly tailored to the research objectives, and as a result, guarantees the success of the scientific work:

The synchronous (descriptive) research method will help us identify the toponyms and ethnonyms of interest.

When processing the collected information, we will apply the method of critical analysis, which involves comparing different authors' variations of the same toponym or ethnonym and conducting a scientific analysis.

Additionally, the synthesis of sources and chronological-comparative analysis are crucial. These will allow us to determine the names of specific settlements across different historical periods, track the migration dynamics of the populations residing there, and observe the succession of ethnonyms in the same geographical area.

Regarding the linguistic analysis of terms and the establishment of norms, at this stage of the research, we will employ linguistic, componential, and etymological analysis methods.

Using extralinguistic methods, we will also determine the motivation behind the naming of specific geographical locations. We will attempt to reconstruct the history of each toponym's origin.

When creating maps, we will utilize the latest advancements in digital humanities, which have proven highly effective in recent years.

**Discussion:** For the study of the issue, it is particularly important to examine the distribution and interrelation of parallel toponyms and ethnonyms, as well as their identification. This is because, in Ancient sources, it is not uncommon for the same name of a tribe or settlement to be mentioned in different territories, either in the same or different periods (e.g., Sanigi, Trapezus, Sani, Heniokhi, Phasis, Zygi, Sebastopolis, Pityus, etc.). For example, Strabo states:

“...μετὰ δὲ τὸν Σινδικὸν καὶ τὸν Γοργιπίαν πτοτέ θαλάττη τὸν οχαιὸν καὶ Ζυγὸν καὶ ονιόχων παραλία τῷ πλέον ολίμενος καὶ ορεινή...εἰτα τὸν Πιτυοῦντα τὸν μέγαν τριακοσίων οξήκοντα μέχρι Διοσκουριάδος.”

“...After Sindike and Gorgippia, along the coast, lies the land of the Achaeans, Zygoi, and Heniochi, mostly harborless and mountainous... then comes the great Pityus, three hundred and sixty stadia away from Dioscurias“ (Στράβων, 1877, p. XI. 2. 12).

According to Pomponius Mela as well:

“in Heniochorum finibus Dioscorias a Castore et Polluce Pontum cum Iasone ingressis.“

“In the land of the Heniochi, there is the city of Dioscurias, founded by Castor and Pollux, who came along with Jason“ (Mela, 1971, p. 111).

On the contrary, according to Flavius Arrian:

“...τούτων δὲ οὐχονται Μάκρωνες καὶ οὐνίοχοι: βασιλεὺς δὲ αὐτῶν οὐγχίαλος. Μακρώνων δὲ καὶ οὐνίοχων οὐχόμενοι Ζυδρεῖται: Φαρασμάνου οὗτοι οπήκοοι.“

“...Next to these (the Sanes) are the Macrones and the Heniochi, whose king is Anchialus. Adjacent to the Macrones and Heniochi are the Zydritae, who are subjects of Pharasmanes [Parsman the Lower]“ (Αρριανός, 2010, p. 15. (11 H) ).

It is noteworthy that Strabo mentions two rivers named Phasis. He also refers to the Chorokhi River as Phasis, meaning we have both the Rioni-Phasis and the Chorokhi-Phasis. The Chorokhi-Phasis originates in Armenia (Στράβων, 1877, p. XI. 2. 17), and its tributary is the Lycos River, which, in turn, separates from the Araxes. Further upstream, in the land of the Moschi, is the Temple of Leucothea. The Glaucus and Hippo rivers also originate from the mountains of Armenia. It takes four days by wagon to reach the Cyrus River, which Strabo identifies as the Mtkvari (Kura). The author also notes that Eratosthenes mistakenly referred to the Lycos as the Thermelon. Elsewhere, Strabo places the source of this river in the mountains above Iberia (Στράβων, 1877, p. XI. 3. 4).

Most scholars attribute such discrepancies to the author's carelessness. In their view, even a cursory glance reveals that the tribes and geographical data listed by ancient authors are often out of order, leading to inconsistencies. They place the same tribe or city in different locations without providing any explanation for this inconsistency.

In our opinion, however, such cases do not necessarily indicate the authors' negligence but rather stem from several factors:

- Primarily due to the migration of tribes. For example, according to Arrian:

“Οπόν οὖν Παλαιάς οχαίας οώς τῷς Παλαιάς Λαζικάς καὶ οπέκεινα οώς οχαίοντος ποταμού πρώην οκουν οθνη ολεγόμενοι ονίοχοι, Κοραξοὶ καὶ Κωλικοὶ, Μελάγχλαινοι, Μαχέλωνες, Κόλχοι καὶ Λαζοὶ, νῦν δὲ οικοῦσι Ζικοί.“

“From Old Achaea to Old Lazica, and beyond to the Achaeus River, there formerly lived the peoples called the Heniochi, Coraxi, Melanchlani, Machelones, Colchians, and Lazes; now the Zikhi live there“ (Ανωνύμου, 1883, p. 59.(18)).

The Lazi, who appear in the southern regions from approximately the 1st century AD, are found in earlier sources farther north (just like the Heniochi) (Καισαρεύς, 1914, p. 8.10.1).

• At the same time, we must take into account that the authors rely on sources from different periods. For example, Claudius Ptolemy seems to have had an Ancient source at hand – his Heniochi are located in the northern part of the eastern coast of the Black Sea (and not in the south, as is the case in later sources). This is also indicated by the mention of the Zinkhi (Zigi) in Sarmatia, which changes from the time of Strabo. By Strabo's time, the Zigi were already on the coast of the Black Sea. It seems that they moved from North Caucasus to Transcaucasia, and sources from the period after Strabo mention them precisely in this territory.

• On the one hand, ancient authors describe the geographical space and the contemporary reality familiar to them. On the other hand, they rely on traditions from different periods. For example, according to Apollonius of Rhodes, the legendary Aia is located at the mouth of the Phasis River, right on the coast.

“κείνου νόον ολάοντες οπό προχοῦς ποταμού οπύργους εσόψεσθε Κυταιέος Αήταο, ολσος τε σκιόειν ορεος...“

“Driving his ship to the outflows of the river, you will see the towers of Aeëtes of Kutaia, and the shady grove of Ares...” (Πόδιος, 1986, pp. II, 402-404).

However, in the works of other authors, its location varies – some place it 22 kilometers from the river, others at 33, 55, and so on.

- A separate point should be made about cases where the same tribal name appears in different territories during the same period. For example, Procopius of Caesarea mentions the Sanni (Sanigs) tribe in two locations along the Black Sea coast – one near Trapezus and the other towards the Abasgi. Likewise, both regions have cities named Sebastopolis and Pityus (Καισαρεύς, 1914, p. 8.3.4).

- It is also important to consider cases where the name of a tribe changes over time. For example, an anonymous source informs us:

„Πόλις οὖν Διοσκουρίδος τοῖς [καὶ] Σεβαστούπολεως ὡς Ψάρου ποταμοῦ πρώην οκουν θνος οἱ λεγόμενοι Κόλχοι οἱ μετονομασθέντες Λαζοί.“

“From Dioscurias, which is also Sebastopolis, to the river Apsarus, there once lived a people called the Colchians, who were later renamed the Lazi” (Ανωνύμου, 1883, p. 48.(7)).

It should also be noted that the same toponyms and ethnonyms are often presented in different forms in the Georgian translations (e.g., Zikh/Zigi, Heniohhi/Henioqi...). We do not have a complete linguistic or etymological analysis of the toponyms and ethnonyms mentioned in the sources.

We believe that it is necessary to develop and establish linguistic standard recommendations – to collect, analyze scientifically, and create one unified Georgian term for the parallel variants of the same ethnic group or geographical location, which also represents the novelty of the research we propose.

As we can see, based on the information provided by Greco-Roman sources, we can partially reconstruct the historical-geographical space of the present-day Autonomous Republic of Adjara; demonstrate how the border, which, according to Ancient sources, simultaneously represents the boundary between Europe and Asia, changed over the course of history. However, several factors must necessarily be taken into account:

- Over the centuries, populations may have changed their settlement locations, and the toponym may have been „carried“ to a new area. Therefore, it is not uncommon for the same ethnonym or geographical name to be found in different regions.

- Populations may have merged with other linguistic groups. As a result, instead of the old geographical nomenclature, a new mixed layer of names emerges, often including bilingual toponyms.

- The ancient Greeks either translated or calqued Kartvelian names, but often replaced unfamiliar toponyms with phonetically similar Greek words. When calquing, due to the peculiarities of Greek phonetics, they often distorted the original names

- When discussing the localization of a particular geographical point, we must consider that over three millennia, riverbeds and coastal lines have also changed.

- Additionally, some surviving Ancient sources may not contain entirely accurate information about certain tribes or geographical locations. Therefore, we should not expect their names or coordinates to have been preserved with absolute precision.

**Conclusions:** We can track the dynamics of tribal movements in our area of interest and their interactions with nearby tribes by conducting research on ancient sources in this area. Therefore, in addition to compiling toponyms and ethnonyms mentioned in ancient sources, we will also present their chronological and onomastic analysis, the area where proto-Georgian tribes settled and their migration dynamics, the history of each toponym's naming, and how border toponyms changed as a result of specific conquerors' or neighbors' linguistic influences.

We believe that the anticipated research results will be valuable for determining various details about the settlement area, migration, lifestyle, and culture of proto-Georgian tribes in the Adjara region, enabling a more complete and clear understanding of their history.

We plan to continue working in this direction in the future. The next stage envisions researching toponymy across the entire territory of Georgia using this methodology, which will help us better analyze

the settlement areas of ancestral Georgian tribes and their migration routes.

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