

THE TRACES OF THE 1951–1952 DEPORTATIONS IN THE ARCHIVES OF AJARA: BUREAUCRACY, RECORD-KEEPING, AND LOCALITY¹

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Abstract. The study briefly examines the history of mass deportations carried out in Soviet Georgia from the 1940s to the early 1950s. This includes the expulsion of ethnic Germans in 1941, Kurds, Azerbaijanis, and the so-called "Meskhetian Turks" in 1944, and Greeks, Turks, and other groups in 1949. The authors note that these state-implemented repressions were driven both by security motives and by the Soviet regime's policy toward "unreliable" elements.

Particular attention is paid to the operation "Volna" ("Wave") in 1951 and its impact on the population of Adjara, where ties to relatives abroad and political distrust are identified as the primary reasons for deportation. The article utilises archival materials from both the National Archives of Georgia and the Archive Administration of the Autonomous Republic of Adjara, focusing specifically on the records of the Batumi District Finance Department, which document the process of inventorying and assessing deportees' property.

An analysis of these documents reveals a highly bureaucratic approach lacking emotional nuance, as well as the significant role of local authorities in property confiscation and valuation. The paper demonstrates that local archives serve as a crucial source for studying the social and economic consequences of these repressions. Finally, the study highlights that this historical period remains insufficiently researched and emphasises the need for further scholarly investigation.

Keywords: Soviet repressions; deportation; Adjara; years 1951–1952; special settlers (spetsperselentsy).

Introduction. One of the most defining characteristics of the Soviet totalitarian system was mass repression, which manifested in various forms and scales throughout the regime's existence. In order to consolidate political control and achieve total influence over society, the government systematically resorted to forced resettlement, arrests, and other repressive mechanisms. These processes had an especially severe impact on multiethnic regions, where the identification of "politically unreliable" groups was frequently based on ethnic, religious, or geographical markers. The study of these repressions is essential not only for restoring historical justice but also for understanding the social, economic, and political dynamics of the Soviet era.

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In the case of Georgia, mass deportations and political purges are subjects of active research; however, a number of events remain insufficiently studied. In this context, the repressions carried out in Adjara in 1951–1952 merit special attention, as they represent one of the final mass acts of state violence of the Stalinist era. The events of these years were linked both to heightened foreign policy tensions between the Soviet Union and Turkey, and to internal political distrust toward specific groups of the population residing in the border region.

Methods. In our research, we utilize the method of analysing archival and bureaucratic documents, which allows us to observe bureaucratic record-keeping at a local, micro-level and to determine its characteristics, language, and specifics.

Discussion. The deportations executed in Adjara were characterised by a deliberate and wide-ranging impact on local society, yet scholarly research on them remains fragmented to this day. For this reason, a thorough examination of this period is necessary to fully uncover the mechanisms and scale of the repressions, as well as their impact on both individuals and the social structure of the region as a whole.

In the 1940s, several major deportations were carried out from Soviet Georgia targeting population groups branded by the authorities as politically unreliable elements. In 1941, ethnic Germans living in the Georgian SSR were expelled. Different authors vary on the total number of deportees, with figures ranging between 23,589 (Pobol & Polyan, 2005, p.283) and 19,186 (Alaverdashvili, 2008, p. 52). According to "Saarqivo Moambe" ("Archival Bulletin"), a journal published by the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia, 5,226 families were resettled (Alaverdashvili, 2008, p.52).

During the Second World War, in April 1944, another smaller-scale resettlement took place. A segment of the Kurdish and Azerbaijani populations—a total of 608 families (3,240 individuals)—was deported from the city of Tbilisi and Tsalka, Borchalo, and Karayazi (Gardabani) districts (Pobol & Polyan, 2005, p.525).

In that same year of 1944, by a top-secret decree of the State Defense Committee dated July 31, it was decided to expel "Meskhetian Turks, Kurds, and Khemshils" from the border zone of the Georgian SSR (Pobol & Polyan, 2005, p.525). As is well known, the vast majority of these so-called "Turks" were Muslim Georgians, while ethnic Turks constituted only a small minority. The resettlement began in late autumn. One of the reasons for this timing was the "completion of the construction of the Borjomi–Vale railway section" (Pobol & Polyan, 2005, p.524). Ultimately, it was via this railway line that their deportation was carried out.

The expulsion primarily affected the aforementioned categories of the population in the Adigeni, Akhaltsikhe, Akhalkalaki, Aspindza, and Bogdanovka (Ninotsminda) districts, regardless of their membership in the CPSU(b) or the Komsomol youth organisation. At this stage, the repression affected the Adjarian Autonomous Republic on a relatively minor scale. The State Defense Committee justified the necessity of the deportation by citing the need to improve state border security along the Turkish sector. In total, "16,700 families, 86,000 individuals" were slated for expulsion from the designated districts (Pobol & Polyan, 2005, p.524).

A new wave of deportations began on the basis of Decree №221-856 of the Council of Ministers of the USSR, dated May 29, 1949, and the USSR Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) Order №00183, dated May 20 of the same year.

The resettlement targeted: "All subjects of Greece/Turkey, former subjects of Greece/Turkey who did not hold Soviet citizenship at that moment, and former subjects of Greece/Turkey who had subsequently acquired Soviet citizenship. Adult members of the families of the people in these categories were subject to resettlement, except for those who had not previously been or were not currently citizens of Greece/Turkey, while minor members were sent to special settlement locations along with the other individuals, i.e., their relatives" (Alaverdashvili, 2009, pp. 42-46).

The following groups were to be permanently exiled from Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Ukraine, and the Krasnodar Krai: 3,620 Dashnak families (13,000 individuals) to the Altai Krai; 1,500 Turkish families (5,400 individuals) to the Tomsk Oblast; 6,000 Greek families (21,600 individuals) to the Dzhambul Oblast; and 1,500 Greek families (5,400 individuals) to the South Kazakhstan Oblast (Pobol & Polyan, 2005, p.671).

The vast majority of the exiled Greeks lived in Abkhazia. Information about them was preserved at the Abkhazian Institute of Language and Culture, under the curation of Nikola Ioannidi. Thomas de Waal (the British journalist and writer on the Caucasus) dedicated several pieces to him and his work (De Waal, 2010, 154). However, these manuscripts remain unknown to the wider public and await publication. In 1958, the Greeks received the right to repatriation and gradually returned to Georgia.

At the proposal of the Ministry of State Security (MGB) of the USSR, the Council of Ministers of the USSR issued Directive №14133 on August 10, 1951. By virtue of this directive, the contingent of Iranians, Turks, and Dashnaks from the Georgian SSR who were not present at their places of residence during the deportations carried out under the decrees of May 29, 1949 (№2214-856) and May 21, 1950 (№727-269) – and had thus evaded resettlement – became subject to expulsion. There turned out to be 69 such individuals (Pobol & Polyan, 2005, p.757).

Thus, the large-scale repressions implemented in the 1940s, which resulted in the uprooting and relocation of massive population groups from their places of residence – a process that continued by inertia into the early 1950s – painfully affected Georgia as well. Against the backdrop of these mass deportations, the Soviet repressions of 1951-1952 in Adjara seemed to be obscured and overlooked by adequate scholarly attention.

The political purge conducted in Adjara in 1951-1952 is still not fully investigated by historians. Yet, this was one of the last mass violent acts against the population of the USSR. The primary accusation brought against the majority of those deported from Adjara was their connection to Turkey and having relatives there. As is well known, relations between the Soviet Union and the Republic of Turkey had become extremely tense by this period, and the border zone fell under heightened scrutiny.

A major contribution to the research of the 1951-1952 events has been made by historian Otar Turmanidze, Chief Researcher at the Niko Berdzenishvili Institute of Batumi Shota Rustaveli State University, who has worked on these issues across various Georgian archives, primarily the former State Security and Adjarian archives.

In 1951, the operation Volna ("Wave") began. Its objective was to deport those individuals from Georgia who had been prisoners of war during World War II and their families, as well as families who had close relatives abroad in capitalist countries, or those whose members had committed desertion during the war. There were other reasons as well.

This operation was carried out painfully in Adjara too. The phrase "traitor Georgian Adjarians" frequently appeared in state security materials. The Ministry of State Security of Georgia drafted a proposal for the expulsion of the so-called "harmful elements" (Russian-"vrediteli") from the republic, which was presented to the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Georgia, K. Charkviani. He supported the Ministry of State Security's proposal regarding the population's expulsion.

"On November 12, 1951, K. Charkviani sent a letter addressed to J. Stalin, in which he attempted to justify the necessity of exiling these 'harmful elements' from Georgia, claiming they posed a danger to the country. K. Charkviani requested the deportation of 6,300 people from Georgia" (Turmanidze, 2019, pp.556–557).

K. Charkviani wrote that: "A significant portion of emigrants and traitors to the motherland live in Adjara. They are compromised by past anti-Soviet activities (armed uprisings against the Soviet State), smuggling

(crossing illegally back and forth into Turkey), participation in the anti-Soviet Pan-Islamist organisation Sedai Millet (the Voice of the People), hiding in Turkey, and maintaining contact with the Turkish Consul in Batumi" (Turmanidze, 2019, p.558).

Following this letter, on November 29, 1951, the Council of Ministers of the USSR adopted a special decree on the deportation of unreliable populations from the border districts of Georgia and Turkey. "After the adoption of this decree, workers of the Ministry of State Security of Georgia identified 'new harmful elements,' as a result of which the contingent of deportees increased to 8,615 individuals (2,189 families)" (Turmanidze, 2019, p.559).

Ultimately, in 1951, 2,581 families—a total of 11,450 people—were expelled from Georgia. This was far more than originally specified at the time by Decree №221-856 that was adopted by the Council of Ministers on November 29, 1951. The expulsion of the population in Adjara was carried out under the harshest conditions. Here, the deportation was executed simultaneously at the beginning of December 1951 and continued into 1952. Due to severe climatic conditions, the plight of the deportees was made even more miserable (Turmanidze, 2019, p.559). While transportation from regional centers to Batumi was done by cargo trucks, individuals from villages lacking road infrastructure were forced to march to the regional centers on foot.

The Archive Division of the Autonomous Republic of Adjara

Information regarding the population deported from Adjara in 1951–1952 is not preserved exclusively in the central archives of Georgia (the former State Security and National Archives are meant). Data about the resettled individuals can also be found in the collections of the Archive Administration of the Autonomous Republic of Adjara. Although the information is fragmented, it clearly demonstrates the local scale of the repressions and their impact on society. In this regard, we must highlight Fund P-1038 (Inventory №4) of the then Batumi District Finance Department. Within the materials of the State Revenue Inspection, which are designated as permanent storage units, extremely interesting records are available concerning the cases of special settlers between 1944 and 1954. Unfortunately, our research group was unable to locate identical materials for other districts of Adjara in the archives.

The documents preserved in this fund include materials from the executive committees of rural councils (Russian "selsovets"). These materials can be divided into three parts:

1. The results of the property estimation of citizens deported from Batumi district in 1951–1952, categorised by the executive committees of rural councils;
2. Lists of special settlers from Batumi district organised by rural councils, along with inventories of their property;
3. Records of statements and complaints filed by citizens in special settlements regarding compensation for confiscated property.

The executive committee of the rural council inventoried and assessed the confiscated property of the deportees. The family composition is not specified in this source; only one member of the household is named. A confiscation protocol was drawn up for each individual family. The itemized property list begins with the residential house and ends with household items or agricultural tools, such as a scythe or a hoe or a shovel (in inventory the Russian word "Lapatka" was used). The scope of the inventory depended on the material wealth of the deported individual (or family). When items were described, their condition was strictly noted: broken, old, new, etc.

Residential houses were described in detail, noting the number of rooms and the building materials used. Stone houses were valued higher. It was crucial to establish whether the deportee owned the entire house or only a portion of it. Confiscation applied only to the share in their possession, not the entire building.

If a house was under construction, the building materials were subject to confiscation and were itemized accordingly.

The assessment documents were filled out post-factum, based on the property inventory acts. The documents are written in a single hand, in clear, legible Georgian. Following the first name, surname, and patronymic of the deported person, the itemized property is listed sequentially and numbered. The handwriting is neat and generally orderly. Practically no errors were made during writing, which suggests that the responsible official later transferred the gathered documentation into a single ledger. The pages show faint pencil lines drawn across them, which enabled the compiler to enter the information in a structurally correct manner.

However, minor errors do exist. Due to the passage of time, it is difficult to determine whether they were accidental or intentional. For example, Mevlud Kartsivadze, son of Ali, had three old, simple wooden chairs in his house, and each was appraised at 10 rubles. However, in the final total, 10 is written instead of 30 (the Archive Administration of the Autonomous Republic of Adjara, 1952). Fund P-1038, Inv. 4, File 29, p. 2). Such instances were not uncommon. Within the text itself, we encounter Russian loan words (barbarisms) that are no longer used in literary Georgian today, such as: *lapatka* (a shovel), *shkafi* (a wardrobe), *etazherka* (a bookshelf), *tumbochka* (a bedside table), *kraoti* (a bed), *skaimeika* (a bench), *kushetka* (a couch), *stoli* (a table) and others.

At the time of deportation, citrus fruits (tangerines, oranges), corn, beans, and other produce present in the household were recorded only by weight, and their monetary value was not indicated. When inventorying citrus plantations, however, even the age of the trees was specified, as this was a vital sector for the economy. Livestock feed, such as hay and straw, was also subject to inventory. It is important to note here that their weights are always recorded in rounded numbers (400 kg, 70 kg, etc.). It is practically impossible for such products to have been kept in exactly these quantities across so many deported households. This leads us to believe that the valuation in these cases was approximate.

In the appraisal ledger, great attention is paid to citrus plantations, which seem to be explicitly targeted. Evidently, seedlings were scarce, and they were later transferred to others or distributed among collective farms.

Furthermore, these case files allow us to infer how people's homes were furnished during that period, what kind of furniture they had, what items they owned, how their houses were roofed, and so forth.

The documents are written in a rigid bureaucratic style, showing no human emotion or empathy.

Conclusions. These local documents allow us to conclude that the collective farms were highly interested in the property of the deportees and attempted to inventory it as accurately as possible because it was to be transferred to them. During the inventory and assessment of property, representatives of the rural councils are clearly visible as the actors who determined the value of the items. Naturally, in such cases, their personal views and local authority were decisive. Given the geographical distribution of the repressed individuals, rural council representatives had the power to make many decisions on the spot, dictated by their own initiative rather than fixed orders.

It is also noteworthy that during the rehabilitation process, when compensation was paid out to the deportees, local organs reimbursed them exactly according to the amounts at which their property had been inventoried and assessed.

In conclusion, archival research on the 1951–1952 deportations continue in Adjara. Local archives, unlike central repositories, vividly illustrate the realities of the resettlement process on the ground and highlight the influence exerted by collective farms and local power structures.

We will continue our work along these lines.

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