

HISTORICAL NARRATIVES ABOUT THE SETTLEMENT OF LAZ-GEORGIAN MUHAJIRS IN  
DÜZCE İLİ (TURKEY)

ისტორიული გადმოცემები ლაზ მუჰაჯირთა დუზჯეს ილში (თურქეთი) დასახლების  
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**Abstract**

In our article we review the narratives about the settlement of Laz Muhajirs in Düzce İli, Turkey. As it is known, The Georgian population of Düzce region of Turkey is mostly made up of descendants of those Muhajirs, who after the 1877-1878 Russo-Turkish War were forced to leave their homeland (Southwestern Georgia) for Ottoman Turkey. One part of the migrants settled the Black Sea coast of Turkey from the very beginning, while others moved here later from other regions of Ottoman Turkey.

Among the Georgian muhajirs who left for the Ottoman Empire after the 1877-1878 Russo-Ottoman war (Turk. "Doksan üç harbı") were many Laz. Most of them were residents of Sarpi-Mak'riali area and Ćxala-Beylewani valleys. These people have settled in the modern Düzce region since the 80s of the XIX century. Their descendants still live there today and more or less well preserve their ethnic identity, mother tongue (the khopian dialect) and traditions. They are divided into two groups - those who came from Sarpi-Makriali call themselves "the Laz from Batumi", and those who left Ćxala and Beylewani valleys - "the Laz from Ćxala".

Today, the descendants of Muhajirs living in Turkey find it more and more difficult to preserve their native languages and customs. Their self-concepts are mostly based on their historical memories – the stories heard from their ancestors describing how they left their native lands for the Ottoman Empire

and settled there. In most cases, the information about their origin, their former family names and the places they settled first on the Ottoman territory etc. were passed down through generations. It is natural that the stories about the difficulties encountered by their ancestors during their migration and life as Muhajirs are their most important memories.

**Key-words:** Laz-Georgians; Muhajirs; Georgia; Turkey; Düzce;

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#### აბსტრაქტი

ჩვენს სტატიაში მიმოვიხილავთ იმ გადმოცემებს რომლებიც შეეხება დუზჯეში ლაზ მუჰაჯირთა დამკვიდრებას. როგორც ცნობილია, თურქეთის ამ რეგიონში მცხოვრები ქართული მოსახლეობა იმ მუჰაჯირთა შთამომავალია, რომლებიც 1877-1878 წლების რუსეთ ოსმალეთის ომის შემდეგ, იძულებული გახადეს, დაეტოვებინათ მშობლიური მიწები სამხრეთ-დასავლეთ საქართველოში და ოსმალეთის იმპერიაში გადახვეწილიყვნენ. ლტოლვილთა ერთი ნაწილი თავიდანვე დამკვიდრდა თურქეთის შავიზღვისპირეთში, ნაწილმა კი მოგვიანებით, თურქეთის შიდა რეგიონებს მიაშურა.

1877-1878 წლების რუსეთ-ოსმალეთის ომის (ანუ, როგორც თურქები უწოდებენ, „93 წლის ომის“) შედეგად, სამხრეთ-დასავლეთ საქართველოდან წასულ მუჰაჯირთა შორის ბევრი ლაზეთის მკვიდრი იყო. მათი უმეტესობა სარფი-მაკრიალის მხარეში ან ჩხალა-ბელღევანის ხეობაში სახლობდა. ეს ლაზები თანამედროვე დუზუჯეს ილის ტერიტორიაზე გამოჩნდნენ XIX საუკუნის 80-იანი წლებიდან. მათი შთამომავლები დღესაც იქ ცხოვრობენ და მეტ-ნაკლებად კარგად ინარჩუნებენ ეროვნულ თვითაღქმას, მშობლიურ მეტყველებას (ხოფურ დიალექტს) და წეს-ჩვეულებებს. ისინი ძირითადად ორ ჯგუფად იყოფიან: სარფი-მაკრიალის მხრიდან წამოსულთა შთამომავლები თავიანთ თავს „ბათუმელ ლაზებს“ უწოდებენ, ხოლო ჩხალა-ბელღევანის ხეობებიდან წამოსულთა შთამომავლები - „ჩხალელ ლაზებს“.

თურქეთში მოსახლე მუჰაჯირთა შთამომავლებს დღევანდელ პირობებში სულ უფრო და უფრო უჭირთ მშობლიურ ენათა და ზნე-ჩვეულებათა შენარჩუნება. მათი თვითაღქმა უმეტესად ეყრდნობა ისტორიულ მეხსიერებას - მამა-პაპათაგან გაგონილ იმ გადმოცემებს, რომლებშიც ასახულია სამშობლოდან ოსმალეთის იმპერიაში გადმოსახლებისა და დამკვიდრების ამბები. მუჰაჯირთა შთამომავლების დიდმა ნაწილმა სწორედ გადმოცემით იცის, საიდან წამოსულან და რა გვარს ატარებდნენ უწინ მათი წინაპრები, სად დასახლდნენ პირველად ოსმალეთის ტერიტორიაზე და ა.შ. ბუნებრივია, მათ ხსოვნაში მნიშვნელოვანი ადგილი უჭირავს გადმოცემებს წინაპართა მიერ მუჰაჯირობის დროს გადატანილ სიმწელეთა შესახებ.

**საკვანძო სიტყვები:** ქართველები (ლაზები), მუჰაჯირები, საქართველო, დუზუჯე

### Introduction

By the San Stefano *Preliminary Treaty of Peace* concluded on March 3, 1878, the historical Southwestern Georgia – **Ac'ara** with **Mac'axela**, **şawşeti**, **Liwana (Nigali)** and the eastern part of **Lazeti (Gonio-Limani district, valleys of the rivers Ćxala and Beylewani)** were ceded to the Russian Empire. Russians merged the mentioned territories to form the Batumi region (“okrug”), which was divided into two parts – districts of Batumi and Artvin. At the end of 1878, with the purpose of ousting ethnic Georgians from the annexed territories, Russian officials promoted the idea of Muhajir migration.

The Ottoman government was also interested in settling battleworthy and hardworking Georgians in the inland part of the empire. Therefore, Ottoman officials spread letters telling about the merciful Ottoman Sultan and the fertile lands, which he offered the former subjects of the empire for settlement. All that had an influence on Muslim Georgians: for fear of Russians, a big part of Muslim Georgians was forced to leave their ancestral homes for good and go to Ottoman Turkey. On February 3, 1882, the official deadline for moving to the Ottoman Empire expired.

**After Cessation of hostilities in 1878, Russia and Ottoman Turkey concluded a top secret treaty, which strictly prohibited the settlement of Muhajirs in the territory lying east of Sivas** (Asan, 2016:42). Consequently, the Ottoman authorities made sure that Muhajirs were concentrated in strategically located places – on the Black Sea coast of Turkey (districts of Ordu and Sinop), also on the outskirts of Istanbul (Sakarya-Düzce-Adapazarı, Izmit, Bursa-İnegöl) and Palestine. (Kasap, 2019:321).

According to the Ottoman documents of that period, a large part of Georgian Muhajirs migrated to the Ottoman Empire after the end of the war, and most of them walked all the way to the destination. “The refugees from Artvin and Batumi were taken to Khopa, Arkabi and other neighboring harbors, where they embarked for Istanbul and other places they chose [themselves]. Others were sent to different places located on the Black Sea coast. The refugees from Kobuleti were settled in the nearest Khopa and

Pazar (Atina) kazas (provinces). In 1879, the refugees who had walked to Trabzon center were lodged in Akcaabat nahiye village Suva (Akyazı) and from that place were later taken to Ordu. By July 1, 1886, 1034 Georgian families (4254 people) coming from Kobuleti had been settled on Ordu kaza coast. Out of this number, 393 families (1572 people) remained in Ordu kaza, while 224 families (932 people) went to Perşembe nahiye, 67 families (355 people) left for Ulubey nahye, 119 families (517 people) went to live in Habsamana, and 231 families (875 people) settled down in Bolaman.”<sup>1</sup> (Demirel, 2009: 1128-1129).

Two large villages populated by Laz muhajirs existed in Düzce back in 1883, when the mayor of the city of Düzce was Müderis Ahmet Efendi (Kasap, 2019:350) Based on Ottoman documents, their names were **Özbay** and **Balpınar**. The village of **Balpınar** exists till nowadays, but **Özbay** is today a district of the city of Düzce.

By early 1920s, Düzce City there was a Georgian district called **Gürcü Mahallesi**, whose residents had mostly migrated from Achara (Kasap, 2019:367). As for the number of Georgians (Acharan and Laz), based on the documents of that period, it exceeded 15 thousand. By the end of the 1920s, the demographic situation in Düzce and Sakarya regions somewhat changed: one part of Kartvelian-speaking Muhajirs went back (according to the narrators, their ancestral villages were merged with Turkey), while others moved to different places. Moreover, the number of Georgian (Acharan and Laz) Muhajirs living in Düzce City significantly increased.

By the end of the 1920s, the demographic situation in Düzce region somewhat changed: one part of Kartvelian-speaking Muhajirs went back (according to the narrators, their ancestral villages were merged with Turkey), while others moved to different places. Moreover, the number of Laz-Georgian Muhajirs living in Düzce City significantly increased.

Apart from **Düzce City** (Namely, in the districts of **Özbay**, **Ballar**, **Çaylık** or **Çay mahallesi** etc.), descendants of Muhajirs who had migrated from Lazeti to contemporary Düzce İli, presently live in the districts of the following villages of **Düzce Merkez İlçesi**: **Beçi köyü**, **Yaka köyü**, **Düzköy**, **Osmanca**, **Suncuk**, **Şekerpınar**, **Dokuzpınar**, **Balpınar**, **Kabalak** and **Enbiya Köyü**. Also, they live in the village of **Yazlık Köyü**, **Golyaka İlçesi** and in the village of **Yeşilköy**, **Akçakoca İlçesi**.

It is noteworthy that in the Duzce region, the themonym Laz refers to both the Muhajirs from Lazeti and the Turkish-speaking population from Trabzon. The Descendants of Laz Muhajirs who preserve Laz dialects are called "Mohti Lazlar" (**moxti** means "come [here]!" in Laz dialects; cf. standard Georgian: **modi**), while the descendants of Turkish-speaking population from Trabzon are called "Trabzonlu Lazlar" (what means "the Laz from Trabzon"). The descendants of the Laz Muhajirs are proud to be "Mohti Lazlar".

As the data on the ethnic makeup of Turkey is not officially collected, we found it difficult to determine the current number of Laz muhajirs in Düzce. Based on the information provided by the local population there are about 30 000 Laz-Georgians living in the region.

## Methods

<sup>1</sup> „Artvin ve Batum göçmenleri Hopa, Arhavi ve diğer takip eden limanlardan vapurlarla İstanbul veya iskân edilecekleri bölgelere sevk edilmişlerdir. Göçmenler, Karadeniz sahili boyunca uygun yerlerde yerleştirilmişlerdir. Batum Çürüksu göçmenlerinden bir kısmı hemen sınıra yakın Hopa ve Pazar (Atina) kazalarında iskân edilmişlerdir. 1879 yılında kara yoluyla Trabzon şehir metkezine gelen göçmenler geçici olarak Akcaabat nahiyesinin Suva (Akyazı) köyüne yerleştirilmişler ve daha sonra Ordu'ya göçmen gönderilmişlerdir. 1 Temmuz 1886 tarihi itibarıyla Ordu kazası dâhilinde toplam 1034 hanede 4254 nüfus Batum Çürüksu Gürcü göçmeni iskân edilmiştir. Bunlardan Ordu kazasında 393 hanede 1575 nüfus, Perşembe nahiyesinde 224 hanede 932 nüfus, Ulubey nahiyesinde 67 hanede 355 nüfus, Habsamana'da 119 hanede 517 nüfus, Bolaman'da 231 hanede 875 nüfus iskân edilmiştir.“

From 6<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> April, during the linguistic field works arranged in the West Black Sea coast of the Republic of Turkey – in the province of Düzce we recorded many different stories from Laz-Georgian Muhajirs' descendants. They told us about their ancestors' adventures in the period when they were banished from their native country and had to settle down in the Ottoman Empire.

During working on this work we used Diasystemic and historical-comparative methods of research. Also we paid attention to field work together with working out scientific literature about work theme – we got trustful scientific works, observed the history of the settlements of ethnic Georgian and other Caucasian muhajirs in the regions of Turkey. as far as it was possible, envisaged typical originality of almost every village in our work; represented research results stage by stage, in scientific papers or articles.

## Results and Discussion

### 1. The laz-Georgians living in Düzce İli; Their Lingual and Ethnic Identity

As mentioned above, among the Georgian muhajirs who left for the Ottoman Empire after the 1877-1878 Russo-Ottoman war (Turk. “Doksan üç harbı”) were many Laz. Most of them were residents of **Sarpi-Mak'riali** area and **Çxala-Beylewani** valleys. These people have settled in the modern Düzce region since the 80s of the XIX century. Their descendants still live there today and more or less well preserve their ethnic identity, mother tongue (the khopian dialect) and traditions. They are divided into two groups – those who came from **Sarpi-Mak'riali** call themselves **batimuri lazepe** "the Laz from Batumi", but those who left **Çxala** and **Beylewani** valleys call themselves **çxaluri lazepe** "the Laz from Çxala".

The Laz (the Chan) is one of the oldest Georgian communities playing the leading role in the Georgian history since the ancient times. Despite the fact that at present the majority of Laz live beyond the Georgian borders, they represent an inseparable part of our country with their speech, history and culture. Large part of Lazeti belonged to Georgian church: when the Georgian church was granted autocephaly, the Khupati Castle (present day Ofi, in the east of Rize) and the whole 'coast of Klarjeti' was under the rule of the king Vakhtang Gorgasali. Nowadays, a part of historical Chaneti (Lazeti) is situated within the Georgian territory /Khelvachauri Municipality/ and Artvin region belong to the Republic of Turkey including Hopa, Borçka and Arhavi ilis (provinces). Also, some Rize provinces: Fındıklı, Ardeşen, Pazar and Çamlıhemşin.

As rightly noted in Tandilava, Putkaradze, Labadze 2012:221, There can be named five major groups of Laz according to their ethnocultural identity:

1. People who regard themselves as inseparable part of Georgian ethnicity despite their education and lack of information. These are the citizens of Georgia, inhabitants of the following villages: Sarpi, Kvariati, Gonio, Makho, Charnali. Simoneti and the inhabitants of Turkey who have appropriate information (the number of such thinkers among Lazians who are citizens of Turkey is quite few).

2. People who regard Laz ethnicity as separate and different from Georgian ethnicity. They think that their native language is Laz. They believe that Laz and Georgians are kindred ethnicities like, for instance, Russians and Ukrainians or Bulgarians and Serbians, etc.

3. People who regard Laz as independent from Georgian ethnicity. They think that their native language is Laz but Laz and Georgians are not kindred ethnic groups; Only Megrelians are kindred with Laz. Thus, they are at equal distance from Turks as well as from Georgians (with exception of Megrelians). This is the viewpoint of radically disposed Laz including 'Lazebura' – an organization founded in Germany.

4. The citizens of Turkey with Laz origins who regard themselves as a part of Turkish nationality regardless the fact whether they know or not any Laz dialects. For instance: In 2004, during his visit in Vitse community, the village of Andravati, the author of these lines witnessed how one local of Lazeti claimed that Laz are the descendants of the Turks coming from the Middle Asia.

5. Assimilated groups of Lazians (the title is conditional): nowadays they live beyond the borders of historical Lazeti (the Republic of Turkey) – in Georgia (several villages of Tsalka region), in Greece (dispersed) and in Ukraine (the Crimea). There can be distinguished two major groups:

a) Urums i.e. Greek-orthodox Laz who became linguistically Turkish and who place themselves at equal distance from Greeks, Turks and Georgians. However, Georgian substrate is evident in their everyday lives and material culture, Turkish speech (they live in Tsalka region and the Crimea).

b) Lazoi ('Lazos' in literature) –Greek-orthodox Laz who became Greeks (or Turks) and regard themselves as a part of Greek ethnicity. The Georgian substrate is less evident in their culture and speech.

Thus, **among the Laz living in the Düzce region, more numerous are those who regard themselves as a part of Turkish nationality regardless the fact whether they know or not any Laz dialects.** Relatively few people regards Laz ethnicity as separate and different from Georgian ethnicity. They think that their native language is Laz. They believe that Laz and Georgians are closely related ethnicities.

The older generation of Laz living in Düzce region remembers well where their ancestors came from. Those who come from Sarpi-Mak'riali live both in the city and in the villages of Düzce İli. According to a respondent from the city of Düzce, his ancestors came from Batumi and at first settled in the village Özbay. Later some of them moved to the city of Düzce.

The narrator Bilal Demir, aged 68, gave us the name of his ancestors' village like this: **Batumi, Mak'riali, Č'ita Noyedi**. It is noteworthy that today, former **Mak'riali** village is called Kemalpaşa and it is a city on the Turkish-Georgian border. Thus, **Č'ita Noyedi** (i.e. "Small beach") is a district of this city. At the time when the ancestors of the Düzce Laz left Lazeti, the village of **Mak'riali** was part of the Batum kazası (Batumi province). Bilal Demir said he is a fifth generation Laz settler in city of Düzce:

**čkin solendon moptiti? čkin Batumi, Mak'riali, Č'ita Noyedišen moptit, batumuri lazi voret. akole en c'oxle mi moxtuja? dedemun dedesi, onun dedemun babasi moxtu. ac'i man kagelagik'orecxa ki: Suleyman dede - ar, akole doyuru, emuč'k'ule Xusejn dede kort'u do iti akole doyuru, uk'ule Resan dede doyuru, uk'ule Lutwi - babačkimi doyuru, sira čkimda ren: man dobyurač'k'ule, maxutani torome iqwen.**

"[You ask] where we came from? We came here from Batumi, Makriali, from the district of Č'ita Noyedi. We are the Laz from Batumi. Who did come here? It was my father's grandfather's grandfather. I will count [now]: one ancestor Suleyman, he died here [in this country]. Then followed Huseyn, he was the second to die here, then followed Resan - he also died here and then followed Lutfu, my father, who also died here. It is my turn now: when I die here, it will be five generations".

It is noteworthy, that our narrator Bilal Demir, his family members and relatives believe that Laz and Georgians are very closely related ethnicities: **lazi do gjurži žumadijberepe renan** "Laz and Gürcüs are the cousins". According to them, Laz and Gürcüs always marry freely to each other, but Laz do not marry to Turks, Bulgarians or any other ethnic group living in Düzce: **gjurži na ren k'oči ajni lazisteri ren!** "Any Gürcü man is just like a Laz!" - told us the narrator Ismail Keskin, age 87, from the city of Düzce.

Another group of Laz living in Düzce are the Chkhalians (**čxalurepe**). Their ancestors lived in the valleys of **Čxala** and **Beylewani**. At the present day, these valleys are on the territory of Borçka ilçesi, Turkey. Like the Laz from Batumi, Chkhalians also speak Khopian dialect, but their speech is considered a separate sub-dialect. in Düzce region, they live in the villages of Düzce Merkez İlçesi **Beçi köyü, Yaka**

köyü, Düzköy, Osmanca, Suncuk, Şekerpınar, Dokuzpınar, Balpınar. One of the our Chkhalian narrators, **Hikmet Tuzcu**, aged 88, knows that their ancestors came to present day Düzce İli from Ćxala valley, but do not remember which village exactly:

**Ćkin Ćxalui lazi voret. Ćxalaşen moptit akon, ama nam oput'eşen moptit, va miĆkin. Ćxala ki iĆoxopan, ama nam oput'e t'u do mu rt'u - va miĆkin.**

“We are the Laz from Ćxala, because we came from Ćxala, but I don't know which village was it. They say [that we came from] Ćxala. So, I don't know which village was it”

Among the Laz-Georgian Muhajirs' descendants living in Düzce, ethnic Laz-Georgians of the elder generation have kept their native language. In their conversations with members of our expedition, they chose to speak Laz. People of this category also speak **the Turkish language**, but they have a Laz-Georgian accent and often use laz words when speaking Turkish. During our expedition, we did not meet anyone who would not speak Turkish; on the other hand, the number of those who do not speak Laz dialects is growing every day. Thus, the Chkhalians know their mother tongue less well than Batumians.

Considering the materials obtained by us, based on their speech codes and code switching, descendants of Muhajir Georgians can be conventionally divided into three groups:

1. People over 50: the third generation – older generation.
2. People between 25 and 50: the second generation – middle generation.
3. People under 25: the first generation - younger generation.

Laz-Georgian Muhajirs living in Sinop mostly fall into the category of the third generation, who have preserved their mother tongue (Laz dialects). Representatives of the second generation have poorer knowledge of Laz dialects, they usually understand, but cannot speak it. As for the generation under 25, they can neither speak nor understand Laz dialects. Hence, there is a serious danger that the Georgian language will disappear in this area settled by Laz-Georgians.

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There is one significant factor:

Due to the Georgian-Turkish code-switching process, the Laz-Georgian speech is at risk of going extinct in Düzce as well as in other regions of Turkey; it is possible that Düzce Laz-Georgians will lose their historical mother tongue.

## 2. Historical narratives about the Laz settlements in Düzce

As our narrators say, five ships sailed in Düzce from Lazeti. When they arrived, this place had been settled by Bulgarians and Düzce was their village. Then the Ottoman government ousted those Bulgarians and gave this place to Laz. “Our ancestors said: This place looks very much like Lazeti, let us settle here, and so they did. This happened during the 1877-1878 war, when Russians entered Sarpi, Mak'riali and Limani, our people could not stay there anymore and they sailed to this place” - told us Zeynep Kara, age 98, a Batumi Laz woman living in the city of Düzce.

Later, in 1890s another part of Laz came in Düzce walking from Istanbul. They were mostly Chkhalian people, who at first settled in Istanbul, but the government did not let them stay there, saying

that there was not enough place and they had better join their fellow-countrymen in Düzce. When they came in that place, went up the mountains and became farmers. They still live there and are still farmers.

Today, the descendants of Laz-georgian Muhajirs living in Düzce find it more and more difficult to preserve their mother tongue and customs. Their Laz-Georgian self-concepts are mostly based on their historical memories – the stories heard from their ancestors describing how they left their native lands for the Ottoman Empire and settled there. In most cases, the information about their origin, their former family names and the places they settled first on the Ottoman territory etc. were passed down through generations. It is natural that the stories about the difficulties encountered by their ancestors during their migration and life as Muhajirs are their most important memories.

#### *A) The story narrated by Enver Tozak*

We recorded the narrative of **Enver Tozak** (Laz-Georgian surname – **Toromanişi**, aged 70), a local resident of Düzce, Çaylar Mahallesi. He told us how Laz-Georgian Muhajirs settled in the place where today's Çaylar mahallesi is situated:

henni c'oxle, lazepe čkini, batumuri lazepe, xut k'aravite akole moxtes. ek - batumis ki rusi moxtu orapes, islamişi dini čkini jasayi qveenano do muslimanepe akole omt'ines. ešoten, didilepe čkini ak moxteenan. amei emindos, pumayepesi opu'e qoperen. entepe dido žengiži milleti t'ušeni, osmanli hukümetik omt'inu do jerepe muşi lazepes komeču. ac'i na čajlar mahallesi ren jeristi ndayi t'een emuas. a ndayiša pumeyi diška očitušeni xvala kamit'u bazi-bazi, mara akole lazepe moxteč'k'ule ek'o mskva ndayi na t'u, k'ai ac'ones, tabi do nžalepe dok'vates, picari doqwes do oxorepe kododges.

lazepes picarişi oxorepeşi dodgimu evelišenbei komičkit'es. ak moptitč'k'ule e zanaati čkinis akoti kogevoč'k'it do k'ai xeša dovič'ipxit.

“At first, our batumian Laz sailed here in five ships. When the Russians entered Batumi, they banned Islam there and expelled Muslims. That's why our ancestors came here. At that time, this place had been settled by Muslim Bulgarians. They were very rebellious people and were ousted by the Ottoman authorities. The government gave these place to Laz. There was a large forest where the Çaylar district is now located. Bulgarians only occasionally have been entered the forest to cut firewood, but when the Laz saw the forest, they liked it and cut it down, made planks and started building houses.

A tradition of building wooden houses was well known to the Laz before. When we came here, we continued our traditions of building and did well.”

In this story, there are two points that deserve consideration:

1) The main reason of leaving the motherland was the fear that Christian Russian could insult the Muslim population.

2) In the new place, The Laz Muhajirs saved themselves through an Ancestral profession: they established a tradition of building peculiar wooden houses in Düzce.

#### *B) The story of Nurdoğan Karaalioglu*

In Özbay, the outlying district of the city Düzce, we recorded the story of **Nurdoğan Karaalioglu** (He does not remember his Laz-Georgian surname, aged 85, originally from batumi) about the relations between the newly arrived Laz-Georgian Muhajirs and the local, the Muslim Bulgarian population of Düzce:



čkini lazepē muažiriša gamaxteškule karaviz gexedez do e k'araviten akole - duzžeša moxtes. k'očepe, lazepē, akolendon jilen oputepeša išuxtimunan. so na en jile en doxedeenan ki, ekole iditja, hukumetik uc'ween. moxteenan muažirepe ak. oxori var uyunan, mutu mutu var uyunan. mu qwan? jajlapez na renan čobanepeša ideenan, kagočweenan - silayi uyut'ez do silayite gočwes, nuyires ešo do: "mu na giyunja, komomčia, gjari komčia!" - uc'wes. akole pumeyepe t'erenan do noč'irelenan entepe čkinepek. ek'ule entepek k'očiši mč'komupe uc'wes lazepes, muažirepes.

"When our Laz people decided to migrate as Muhajirs, they sailed in a ship. That ship took them here to Düzce. Those people, the Laz, went [up] from here, to the highest villages and settled there: the government said they could not stand living by the sea. When they came here, they had nothing, no house to live in! They went up the mountains and robbed the shepherds grazing their sheep on pastures. The newcomers were armed, so they pointed their guns at locals [saying]: "give us everything you've got, give us your sheep or some, bring us something to eat!" etc. The locals were Muslim Bulgarians, and they were really disturbed by our people [Georgian Muhajirs]. They were so scared of Laz Muhajirs that called them man-eaters."

Some Ottoman documents confirm the fact that the Muhajirs coming from the Russian Empire were armed or purchased weapons immediately after their arrival (Kasap, 2019:342). Moreover, the Istanbul authorities considered the Muslim Bulgarians, who made a large part of local population living in the Black Sea coastal villages in Düzce, as unreliable residents and did not trust them. From the above story we can see that at first the relations between Muhajirs and the local population were tense: The Bulgarians called Muhajirs the "man-eaters".

### *C) The story narrated by Selma Nişancı*

In the city of Düzce, we recorded one more narrative from **Selma Nişancı**, (Laz-Georgian surname – **Tanališi**, aged 70) about his ancestors' futile attempt to return to Batumi:

e didilepe čkimi ak batumišen moxteenan. mezoyepe t'eenan do a ndayiz var jazdeenan. geri goktimuša guri uyut'eenan do, "vidatja, geria oxorepe čkinišaja goviktatja" do, ašoten dolisimadeenan. igzaleši hududiša, rusik ek: "tkvan mi et, mi oyli gic'umelan?"-dedi, zorile dodgineen do k'itxteen. čkinja tanaloyli voretja uc'wešk'ule, rusepek xoloti: "wuu! igzalit ačkwa turkieša!"-dedi, atxozeenan. ek tanališia do mitxani didi eškia t'een ar k'oči do emušen aškuinet'es. ašoten doskides ki didilepe čkimik turkies

"My ancestors came here from Batumi. They were sailors and could not stand the mountains Some of them wanted to go back... so they set off for their homes. When they reached the border, Russians stopped them. "Who are you? What is your name?" [The Russian border guards asked them]. "We are Tanalishi people!" - my ancestors said. "Oh, Go back at once in Turkey!" Among the people with the last name Tanalishi there were many well-known outlaws. Thus, our men turned back and returned here to Turkey."

Out of the numerous materials we recorded in dialect, we chose the above given stories illustrating Muhajirs' futile attempts to return home. Some Ottoman documents contain a lot of information about the disappointed Muhajirs' unsuccessful endeavors to go back to their motherland. From this point of

view, the documentary materials is of special interest; namely, the protocol drawn up by the police of Sinop city, dated 2, October 1883 (in Hijra: 30 Zul-qadda 1300). The protocol says that a small group of Georgian Muhajirs arrived in Sinop from Istanbul. Their final destination was Batumi. They talked to one of the ship captains and asked him to take them to Russia illegally in exchange for money. The captain promised to help, but ended up betraying them. As the Muhajirs went aboard the ship, the police arrested all of them and wanted to send them back to Istanbul, but finally let them stay in Sinop. At the same time, the Muhajirs received a strict warning from police that in case of another attempt to go to Russia, they would be punished (Karaaslan, 2019:407).

### Conclusions

Today, the descendants of Caucasian Muhajirs living in Turkey find it more and more difficult to preserve their native languages and customs. Their Circassian, Abkhaz-Abazian and Georgian self-concepts are mostly based on their historical memories – the stories heard from their ancestors describing how they left their native lands for the Ottoman Empire and settled there. In most cases, the information about their origin, their former family names and the places they settled first on the Ottoman territory etc. were passed down through generations. It is natural that the stories about the difficulties encountered by their ancestors during their migration and life as Muhajirs are their most important memories.

The topics of the narratives we recorded from Georgian Muhajirs' descendants describing the difficulties encountered by their ancestors during the first years spent as Muhajirs fall under the following categories:

- 1) **The main reason of leaving the motherland:** the fear that Christian Russian could insult the Muslim population.
- 2) **Difficult living conditions in the territory allotted to them for settlement in Ottoman Turkey:** Based on the materials obtained in the regions studied by us the Ottoman government allotted lands for Muhajirs in the coastal area full of mosquitoes. Muhajirs, who used to live in mountainous villages before they left, could not stand the mosquitoes and the humid climate and started settling the upper valleys, which were much more difficult to cultivate.
- 3) **Conflicts with the local population:** The lands that the Ottoman government gave to Muhajirs had already been settled by the local population, who were hostile to the newcomers.
- 4) **Futile attempts to return home:** After arriving in Ottoman Turkey, one part of disappointed Muhajirs attempted to return to Georgia, but neither Russians nor Ottomans let them go.

It is worth noting that the above issues are not only discussed by elderly people, whose Georgian is quite good, but by the younger generation as well. Despite young people (aged under 25) being practically unable to speak Georgian and having lost touch with the Georgian culture, the ethnical identity (self-concept) of Muhajirs' descendants remains Laz-Georgian. This is largely conditioned by the sad stories of first Muhajirs, which like myths have been circulating in the community. However, the modern system of education and young people's mass movement to cities naturally lead to their alienation from older generations' stories and consequently to their mental assimilation.

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