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<sup>1</sup> The group of researchers refers to Truso, Mna George and the villages at their entrance.

<sup>2</sup> მკვლევართა ჯგუფი გულისხმობს თრუსოს, მნის ხეობას და მათ შესასვლელში არსებულ სოფლებს.

## Abstract

The historical-geographical and geopolitical location of Georgia determined the frequency of migration processes in the territory of our country from the early period. For centuries, ethnic groups from the Middle East and the North were settling here. Over time, some of the migrants merged with the local population or other ethnic groups, while others retained their cultural identity until the end. An objective study of the history of the state of Georgia and the ethno-cultural features of its population is impossible without comparing the way of life of the Georgian people and the ethnic groups living in Georgia, observing the differences and similarities of the elements of traditional cultures.

The article examines the cultural identity factors of the population of the highland Trusso located in the Central Caucasus. For centuries, the gorge played a strategic role in the border defense system of the northern gate of the Kingdom of Georgia, and even today it has not lost its importance in the northern border zone of Georgia with the Russian Federation. Due to the migration processes mentioned above, from the 18th century, the Trusso Gorge became an area of Georgian-Ossetian cultural relations. Nevertheless, the analysis of existing and newly discovered historical sources and field expedition materials reveals that Trusso and Mna Gorge have preserved the main characteristics and cultural values of the ethno-cultural identity created by the ancestors of Georgians.

**Keywords:** Trusso; population; culture; values; identity factors; studies of the past.

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**აბსტრაქტი.** საქართველოს ისტორიულ-გეოგრაფიულმა და გეოპოლიტიკურმა მდებარეობამ, ჩვენი ქვეყნის ტერიტორიაზე მიგრაციული პროცესების სიხშირე ადრეული პერიოდიდან განაპირობა. საუკუნეების განმავლობაში აქ მკვიდრდებოდნენ, ახლო აღმოსავლეთიდან და ჩრდილოეთიდან მოსული ეთნიკური ჯგუფები. დროთა განმავლობაში მიგრანტთა ნაწილი ადგილობრივ მოსახლეობაში ან სხვა ეთნიკურ ერთეულებში გაითქვიფა, სხვებმა კი ბოლომდე შეინარჩუნეს თავიანთი კულტურული იდენტობა. საქართველოს სახელმწიფოს ისტორიისა და მისი მოსახლეობის ეთნო-კულტურული თავისებურებების ობიექტური შესწავლა შეუძლებელია ქართველი ხალხისა და საქართველოში მცხოვრებ ეთნიკურ ჯგუფთა ყოფა-ცხოვრების წესის ურთიერთშედარების, ტრადიციულ კულტურათა ელემენტების განსხვავებებსა და მსგავსებებზე დაკვირვების გარეშე.

ნაშრომში შესწავლილია ცენტრალურ კავკასიონზე მდებარე მაღალმთიანი თრუსოს მოსახლეობის კულტურულ იდენტობათა ფაქტორები. ხეობა საუკუნეების მანძილზე, საქართველოს სამეფოს ჩრდილოეთ კარიბჭის სასაზღვრო-თავდაცვით სისტემაში სტრატეგიულ როლს ასრულებდა და დღესაც არ დაუკარგავს თავისი

მნიშვნელობა რუსეთის ფედერაციასთან არსებულ საქართველოს ჩრდილოეთ სასაზღვრო ზოლში. ზემოთხსენებული მიგრაციული პროცესებიდან გამომდინარე, XVIII საუკუნიდან თრუსოს ხეობა ქართულ - ოსური კულტურული ურთიერთობების არეალი აღმოჩნდა. მიუხედავად ამისა, არსებული და ახლადგამოვლენილი საისტორიო წყაროებისა და საველე ექსპედიციის მასალების ანალიზი ცხადყოფს, რომ თრუსომ და მის ხეობამ შემოინახა ქართველთა წინაპრების მიერ შექმნილი ეთნოკულტურული იდენტობის ძირითადი მახასიათებლები და კულტურული ფასეულობები.

**საძიებო სიტყვები:** თრუსო; მოსახლეობა; კულტურა; ფასეულობანი; იდენტობის ფაქტორები; წარსულის ეტიუდები.

**Introduction.** Trusso and Mna gorges with the surrounding villages were part of the historical part of Georgia - "Khevi" in the past and were inhabited by tribes of Kartverian origin - first the Tsanars, later the Dvalis. From the second half of the 13th century, the newly established state of the Golden Horde began to harass the Ossetian tribes living in the fields of the North Caucasus. The displaced Ossetian population, thrown out of their places of residence, first took refuge in the mountains of the Caucasus, Dvaleti on the northern border of the Kingdom of Georgia, and the southern slopes of the Caucasus. Written sources confirm that the arrival of the Ossetians in the Central Caucasus was not peaceful, which resulted in the migration of part of the Dval population from Dvaleti to Trusso and Mna gorges and the integration of Dvals and Tsanars of Georgian origin. In the 14th century, George V (1318-1346) the Magnificent created special legal norms. Part of the resettled Ossetians returned to their place of residence, while part of them were deported. Georgian-Ossetian relations, which in previous centuries were based on traditional, good-neighborly and sometimes kinship ties, were settled.

At the beginning of the 15th century, in the conditions of the struggle against the various state formations that were violent on the southern borders of Georgia, the last kings of united Georgia found it difficult to deal with the unruly military force living across the Caucasus. After the collapse of the Kingdom of Georgia at the end of the 15th century, the unified border and defense system of the country was dissolved. It is true that Dvaleti, Truso and Mna gorges were part of the Kartli kingdom and were traditionally royal lands, but in the conditions of the internal political struggle in the country, it was impossible to protect the population living on the border from the frequent attacks of the Ossetians.

The Trusso Gorge, once the home of the ancestors of Georgians, together with the Mna Gorge and the surrounding villages of Kobi village at the entrance of the gorges, today is empty of inhabitants and includes the site of ruined villages.

**Research methods.** The method of historical-comparative and historical-source-scientific analysis, cyclical study of sources and systematic analysis is used in the work. Empirical analysis of the material found as a result of field work was carried out, various types of Georgian and foreign historical sources were processed, new archival materials identified in the Tbilisi archives and the Stepantsminda Historical Museum, written monuments studied and identified during the field expedition, defensive, residential and church buildings were analyzed in the work based on an interdisciplinary, complex research. The historical past of Trusso and Mna gorges is presented, the main factors of the cultural identities of the population of the region are specified.

**Research result.** Research on Trusso has revealed signs crucial to the cultural identity of the region's population: ancient narratives of collective historical memory, traditions, language, religion, customs, historical artifacts, written monuments, and more. Despite the difficult historical times characteristic of the border region over the centuries, Trusso has preserved the main features of the identity created by the ancestors of Georgians: defensive and residential buildings with traditional forms characteristic of the Georgian cultural world, written tradition, inscriptions written in the Georgian alphabet, the outlines of which letters, the stylization of graphemes and other identifiable forms find analogies with other inscriptions of Svaneti, Khevi, Javakheti and other mountain regions of Georgia. It should be noted that the small local variants revealed in the written culture of the mountain regions are characteristic and known for the history of the development of ancient alphabets. Centuries-old forms of secular and ecclesiastical architecture in Trusso, religious identity and sentiments, the unity of small-scale artifacts create a common picture of the main cultural values of the population.

**Discussion.** The narrative containing the cultural identity of the population of Trusso is reflected in Georgian and foreign written sources, according to which the Tergi valley has been inhabited entirely by the Tsanar Kartvelian tribe since ancient times. In later times, they played a big role in the formation of the principality of Kakheti. The Tsanars take the lead in the fight against the Arabs and gradually settle in the bar of Kakheti. Their migration to Kakheti Bar was also caused by the economic situation (Topchishvili, 2016: 49).

Belonging to the Georgian world of Tsanars should be indisputable, because the toponymy and epigraphy of the ravine of their original settlement is Georgian. Tsanareti was part of Tsilkani bishopric, where divine service was held in Georgian. So, according to different

sources of classification, it is quite obvious that Tsanars were the ancestral tribes of Georgians by language and church, i.e. culturally-historically. (Japaridze, 2012: 89).

Based on the narrative of the collective historical memory - the Georgian historical tradition, R. Topchishvili states that since the 13th century, a big part of the territory of Tsanareti, empty by Tsanars, has been occupied by the Dvali, an indigenous Georgian ethnic group, oppressed by the Ossetians, up to the Trusso Mna gorge. At the same time, the name of the second large part of the historical Tsanareti is changed and it is called Khevi (Topchishvili, 2016: 50).

In the composition of "Moktsevai Kartlisai" ("Conversion of Kartli"), while talking about the political situation of Kartli in the sixth century, in particular, the cancellation of the kingship in Kartli by Sassanid Iran and the capture of the passes connecting the mountains of Eastern Georgia with the North Caucasus by the Iranians, Tsanareti gorge is mentioned, "and as the kingship ended in Kartli, Persians strengthened and conquered Ereti and Armenia. And Kartli was mostly captured. And the Caucasians entered, and the Ovseti gates were conquered: one large gate in Ovseti, two gates in Dvaleti and one gate in Durdzuketi Parchuans. And inhabitants of Mtiuleti were appointed as guards. They also appointed a certain man as the chief of Tsanareti Gorge (Moktsevai, 1963: 94-95). The location of the "Khevi" mentioned in the historical monuments of the later period corresponds to the "Tsanareti Gorge" of the "Moktsevai Kartlisai". Vakhushti Bagrationi, when he describes the location of today's Khevi and its bordering areas, also mentions in another place that "Khevi" is a changed name. "Khevi is the same Dvaleti. The kings of Kartli firmly owned this side. One part of it, where the beautiful Tergi flows, was called Khevi (Vakhushti, 1973: 634; Tsagareishvili, 2012: 251)".

After the 10th century, Tsanareti was divided into three small historical-ethnographic corners: Trusso, Mna and Khevi. The fact that Mna represented a separate middle micro-region located between Trusso and Khevi, is clearly seen from the writings of the "Dzegli Eristavta" ("Monument of Eristavis"), according to which, the people of Trusso and Mna are opposed to each other. After the migration of Tsanars from Truso, another Georgian ethnographic group, Dvali, came to this area (Topchishvili, 2019: 34-35). Based on the sources mentioned above, Roland Topchishvili explains that Tsanareti disappeared from the historical Tsanareti, due to the migration of the Tsanareti to plains, from the Tergi Gorge//Tsanareti Gorge Tsanareti disappeared, and only "Khevi" remained, the inhabitants of which we call Mokhevs today (Topchishvili, 2019: 32).

During the existence of the united Kingdom of Georgia, Trusso was part of the northern border system of the Georgian state and was represented by Georgian ethnic tribes, first Tsanari, and after the migration of Dvali, by Dvali-Tsanari population. At that time, Trusso and the border lands to the north were part of the royal domain and were governed by the

royal court of Georgia. The Georgian historical writing and literature of the 11th-13th centuries distinguished this region not only by the defense system of the state, but also by the particularly loyal approach of the Bagrations to the royal government.

According to the writings of "Istorianni and Azmani Sharavandettani", when King Tamar sent Ivan Atabag to the mountains to subdue the rebellious Pkhovels, among the mountaineers named here along with the Mokhevs, the Trusso people are not mentioned, as R. Topchishvili notes that during the campaign of Ivan Atabagi in the 12th century, a separate ethnographic group Trussoeli was not yet formed in the heads of Tergi, which is why Trusso and Trussoeli are not mentioned (Topchishvili, 2019: 32-33).

At the turn of the 13th-14th centuries, due to the difficult political situation at the royal court of Georgia, Truso was raided several times due to the rivalry between the kings of Georgia, David VIII and his half-brother Vakhtang III. At the time when King Vakhtang and his faithful Eristavi Shalva Kvenipneveli accompanied the Mongols to the horde, King David plundered the estate of Kvenipneveli - Tskhradzmkhkevi. Returning from the horde, Kvenipneveli and Vakhtang III attacked Mtiuleti, Khevi and Dvaleti in support of David VIII: "Then they sacked all the valleys of Dvaleti and destroyed all the fortresses from **Trusso** to Achabeti" - it is mentioned in the genealogical chronicle of the Kvenipneveli family (Dolidze 1965 : 106).

As a sign of loyalty, King Vakhtang III "provided to Shalva **Trusso**, Ghuda, Gagasdzeni, Mlete, Arahueti, Khando, Kanchaeti, Abazaszeta estate, Dzagnakornani, Dighuami, Gavazi, Atseriskhevi, Bekhushe (Dolidze 1965: 106)". Thus, from the beginning of the 14th century, the nobility of Ksani took possession of Trusso.

From about 1628, Zurab Aragvi's Eristavi subjugated Khevi, and Trusso was also to come under his possession from that time and was part of Aragvi Saeristavo until 1743 - until the Saeristavo was abolished by Teimuraz II and Erekle II. Prior to the abolition of Aragvi Saeristavo, in 1742, the peasants' rebellion started in Saeristavo, the main reason of which was the increase of begara-taxes and the cruelty of the ruling nobles. Along with the peasants, the dissatisfied nobility of the Eristavs also participated in the uprising. The rebellion lasted for several years and covered the entire Saaragovo, including Khevi and Trusso. The rebels killed the Eristavis of Aragvi, attacked the houses of the feudal lords of Kartli, destroyed them and stole a lot of property. The rebels invited King Teimuraz II as their master. The king entered Saeristavo with his army and promised the rebels to maintain the old imposed taxes. Instead, he demanded obedience from them, took hostages from the commanders and appointed his officials in Saeristavo. However, this did not solve the problem of Saeristavo. In 1746, the rebellion erupted with new force and it spread to the territory of Ksani Saeristavo and Didi Liakhvi. This time, the kings of Kartl-Kakheti subdued the rebels with weapons. Teimuraz II



entered Ksani Saeristavo with the army of Kartli and stopped in Vanati. Erekle II captured Ananuri with the army of Kakheti. The kings connected the roads of both Saeristavos. For the first time, Erekle attacked the rebel Ossetians of the Aragvi Gorge - "they took forty towers, burned them, and captured Trussians (Orbeliani, 1981: 113). "...when the Ossetians of Ksani heard about this story and the story of the devastation of Aragvi's Ossetians, they came immediately to Vanat and begged King Teimuraz, the foundation of all goodness, to hide crime and gave full husbandry service" (Orbeliani, 1981: 113).

After the annulment of the Aragvi Saeristavo, it was declared a royal estate. Trusso was ruled by the children of Erekle II: first Vakhtang (1743-1756), and after his death, his brother, Levan Batonishvili (1756-1781).

The cultural identity is also expressed in the materials depicting the socio-economic and agricultural existence of the population of Trusso. Princes in Trusso, Kobi and Mna had their own officials - Mouravis (regional governors) and deputies. At the end of the 18th century, Ninia Kobiashvili is mentioned as the Mouravi of Truso, while Gogia Nazghaidze and Ninia Nazghaidze are mentioned as her deputies. In the same period, the Mouravi of Mna was Otia Zandukeli, and the Mouravi of Kobi was Chialashvili (lit. Muz, document N16597). According to the deed issued by Elisbari, the chief royal treasurer of Erekle II, King assigned Iase Tchkariauli as a deputy of Kobi, Ukhata and Tolgota (Stephantsminda Museum: document #1067 (before that, during the rule of the Eristavis, Januka Nazghaidze was mentioned as the Mouravi of Tolgota, Kobi, Ukhata and Ghuda) (Chronicles, 1967:) The duties of the Muravis and deputies included collecting taxes, censusing the population and, in case of war, bringing out warriors.

Like the population of Kartl-Kakheti, the people of Trusso also paid various types of state taxes, among them was the land tax, which was called "kalani", the same as "sakomlo". The tax was 5 sheep every two years, and 12 sheep in the third year. The peasants living on the "satarkhno" land (free kindgom land) only paid "samaspindzlo", which meant hosting and expressing hospitality to officials sent by the royal court or princes. "Samaspindzlo" was collected mainly in the form of cattle. Three cows or horses were given as "samaspindzlo" for the peasants living on the Trusso "satarkhno" land once in three years (Acts, Volume VII: 349).. From the second half of the 18th century, "Saleko", a new state tax intended for the rent of the mercenary army of Leks, was established for the population of Eastern Georgia, which the mountain population, including the peasants of Trusso, paid in grains (NMC,3906).

During the Russian rule, taxes on the population of Trusso were increased, and each "sakomlo" was taxed with 12 sheep, and "satarkhno" land area with a cow, which amounted to 1 manat per sheep and 5 manats per cow (Acts, 1878: 349).



Barley was mainly grown in Trusso, which is characteristic of the agricultural life of the population of the mountain region of Eastern Georgia. Wheat was sown in a small area near the village of Zakagori; they plowed the land with a plow and a pair of oxen. The main economic activity of the population was sheep and cattle breeding, for this reason there were excellent pastures and meadows in Truso. They made quite good felt wool, bashlyks, and felt cloaks, they wove shawls from maud (it is also known by the name "Ossetian thick wool" (NMC, 12398); they made cheese from milk, and coats and belts from leather. They sold their products both on the military road of Georgia and took them for sale in Telavi and Tbilisi (Acts, 1978: 349).

By the church administrative division, according to the document of the 15th century, Trusso was included in the flock of Samtavisi, and people from Samtavisi were required to pay 6 loaves of bread, three drachmas, six bast sandals and four ties to the head of the village (Dolidze, 1970 : 198). At the same time, the population of Trusso and Mna also had a certain obligation to the Sakdrishvili of Gergeti - the status of "mokidebuli" (a person under the protection of the church, at the same time a parishioner of this church). "... the people of Mna and Trusso together with people from Kanobili were under the protection of Gergeti temple" - is mentioned in the 1439 document of Gergeti Souls' Chronicle. The document does not give a precise explanation about the status of "mokidebuli", but, as scientists think, people in Mna, Trusso and Khurti-Kanobelti had relatively easy obligations towards the monastery compared to the rest of the Khevi villages (Sharashidze, 1954: 247). In this regard, it is worth noting the information of Alexander Kazbegi, that even during the writer's lifetime, the people of Trusso donated one vessel of barley per "komli" to the Gergeti Monastery. "This Saint Trinity Monastery is given one vessel (12 kilograms) of barley for per "komli" every year for the Gergets in the entire gorge and even in the Trusso George," the writer notes (Mochkhubaridze, 1880, N156).

Until the 30s of the 18th century, reports about non-Georgian population in Trusso are not confirmed in Georgian written documents. In the earliest documents, such as the "Dzegli Eristavta" (end of the 14th-15th centuries), the "Chronicle of the Spirits of Gerget" (1439), the "Book of the Drama and Introduction of the Samtavisi Flock" (15th century), there are no references to the existence of the Ossetian population in Trusso. From the second half of the 18th century, after the transformation of Saeristavo into a royal estate, we can already find information about newly built Ossetian villages in Trusso. The works of Vakhushti and Ioane Batonishvili, as well as the lists of state tax payers provide an opportunity to create a certain idea about this issue.

According to Vakhushti, "the residents of Trusso are Ossetians, Dvals". That is, in the first half of the 18th century, there was already a mixed population - local Georgian Dvals and

arrived Ossetians (Vakhushti, 1973: 357). Documents of the last period of the 18th century confirm that the organized migration of large groups of Ossetians from the North Caucasus to Kartli took place. For example, in 1799, Giorgi XII wrote to the Ossetians of Tagauri: "I want to tell the Ossetians of Tagaura, who came in through the crossing ways, that if you still want to come down, we (the king) are sending you the noble Ninia Gabashvili and we will deliver the word to you and he will tell you. When you were at peace, our father and king, was merciful to you. We will be more merciful and supportive of you, and we will watch over you well. You will be royal serfs and no one else will have rights over you. First, you have to come to Dighomi and live there, then we will choose a better place. If you like it we will put you there and make a defense fortress for you. Until you have the income from plowing and sowing, you will not pay a per capita tax" (NMC, Qd-1617).

As can be seen from the documents, the royal court of Georgia allowed Tagauri Ossetians to migrate and settle in the territory of Aragvi Saeristavo and created appropriate conditions. Another proof of this is the letter of Ioane Sakltukhutsesi (chief steward) to Gori Mamasakhlisi (village headman), dated 1790, in which he instructs him to provide the Ossetians of Aragvi with bread, wine and cheese (NMC, Hd-12580).

The Ossetians themselves saw the care of the Georgian kings and nobles, they declared loyalty to the royal court of Georgia and, if necessary, fought alongside the rebellious nobles. After the annexation of the Kingdom of Kartl-Kakheti by Russia in 1801, several anti-colonial and anti-dominion uprisings took place in Georgia, among them the population of Truso was actively involved in the Mtiuleti uprising that began on social grounds in 1804: on June 4, 1804, Colonel Prince Eristavi wrote to Pavle Tsitsianov about the uprising: "...we sent reports to your excellency 5 times, 2 reports were captured by the rebellious Mtiuli and 2 reports went through Ksani... the people of Mtiuleti came to Kob with about 1000 men. The Ossetians from Truso, about 100 men joined them... the people of Mtiuleti and Truso took food, ammunition and medicine from Kobi... (Acts, 1868: 307-308). From the mentioned letter, it can be seen that Ossetians from Truso participated in the 1804 Mtiuleti rebellion, which is one of the brilliant pages of the national liberation struggle of Georgians against the Russian Empire. Although the rebellion was defeated, the empire made sure that the Georgians would not accept the abolition of state institutions so easily. Unfortunately, national movements against Russian colonial policy in Georgia were unsuccessful.

After the abolition of the Kingdom of Kartl-Kakheti by Russia, a central government similar to the Russian gubernias was created. The kingdom of Kartl-Kakheti was divided into five mazras (districts), and Truso, as well as Khevi, were united in Dusheti mazra.

We find information about the demography and cultural identity of the population of Truso in the books of foreign travelers and diplomats, who tell us about the natural-

geographic conditions, historical past, traditional existence and economic life of Trusso. In this regard, the references of Johan Güldenstedt, Dietrich Christoph von Rommel, Gottfried Mertzbacher and others are important (Akhaladze, Shiolashvili, Pkhaladze, Burduli, Kistauri, 2021: 7-10). For example, the German scientist Johann Güldenstedt tells us in his book about the similarities between the economic activities and the living culture of the Georgians and Ossetians living in Trusso, the leaders of the local communities. In Trusso, Güldenstedt names the villages inhabited by Georgians and Ossetians: Res, Siverout, Gimara, Tsotsolta, Burmasek, Khudzani or Karatkau, Valandebdze, Dalagdendze, Barsi, Suatis, Abano and Ketris. The author points out that this area was in the possession of Eristavi of Aragvi, however, after the abolition of Saeristavo, it was submitted to the king of Kartl-Kakheti, Erekle II (Güldenstedt, 1962: 65). The second German historian, ethnographer and philologist Dietrich Christoph von Rommel (1781-1859) states that in the north of the country there are Ossetians with Georgians who obey the Georgian princes; and you will meet Jews everywhere. They live without harassment. Because they equally shared the plague and feast of Georgians" (Romeli, 2011: 26-27).

In determining the cultural identities of the population, a special place is given to defensive structures, types of residential houses and forms of church architecture. It is significant that we have this kind of information among the references of foreign authors. For example, the books of the French painter Henri Blanchard (1805-1873), learned archaeologist and traveler, ethnographer and naturalist Frédéric Dubois de Montperre (1798-1850) describe the natural environment and architectural monuments of Trousseau, including defensive structures. Güldenstedt's discussion on the settlements of the valley (Kobi, Mna, Okrokana, Nogkau), existing and now destroyed temples (Kobi), Christian shrines, sacral towers and fortifications (Okrokana, Kobi), hunting grounds and farming traditions (Dubois de Montperre 1840) is noteworthy. : 261).

Today, the villages described in the books of foreign travelers have turned into the site ruined villages, but they are easily identified, because the defensive and residential structures have survived to this day, which helps to determine the cultural identities of the population of Trusso and to study the cultural symbols and historical artifacts preserved in the region. Defensive structures, church architecture and types of dwellings preserved and preserved in the valley to this day find similarities with the material culture of other mountain regions of Eastern Georgia.

The villages of Trusso have unified systematic planning. For the most part, the site of ruined villages consists of a residential area, a tower house, and a defensive tower. There is a square between the residential areas, where the population gathered and decided important issues. Cult buildings, remains of churches can sometimes be found in the villages. Sometimes

churches-monasteries are built outside the villages, on elevated or visible places for the valley. This indicates the importance and role of church life in the population of the region.

Residential houses are mostly two-storied, built with crushed stone. The inter-floor ceiling is destroyed almost everywhere. In these houses, the first floor was used for commercial purposes and it is relatively low and less illuminated. The entrance has a narrow and low window, although it is significantly narrowed from the outside. On the second floor there is a living room, and unlike the first floor, the doors here are bigger and wider. Some houses still have a massive staircase from the outside to the second floor. Old residential buildings of this type are characteristic of all historical-geographical corners of the mountainous region of Eastern Georgia, as well as in the mountain zone of Western Georgia. Unlike them, hrusso is empty today and the remaining artifacts show us the time of previous centuries.

In addition to the named ancient artifacts, when studying the cultural identity of the population, we naturally cannot ignore the written monuments of the Trusso Valley, which are one of the most important characteristics of the cultural identity, and it fully reveals the dynamic nature of the identity, on the basis of which the most visible and clear perception of the cultural or ethno-cultural identity is made.

The famous identity researcher Anthony David Smith considers ethnic and national identities as models of cultural identity. In turn, cultural identity is the basis of ethnic and national identity (Smith 2004: 32-39). Cultural values of this or that nation, people, population are traditions, symbols, folklore, myths and legends, in which the collective memory of this society is reflected. Among the diversity of cultural values, one of the leaders is written culture, which expresses the leading aspirations of the nation that created it.

The written culture of Trusso is represented entirely by epigraphic monuments, two different eras are distinguished between them: in the first, the written culture characteristic of medieval Georgia can be seen, and in the second - the policy of the Garuses started by the Russian Empire in the 80s of the XIX century, which is reflected in the Russian-language tombstone epitaphs. The lower chronological limit of Georgian inscriptions is the 10th century, the upper chronological limit is the 20th century. Most of the surviving inscriptions are tombstone epitaphs, which are mostly dated to the 18th, 19th, or early 20th centuries. The oldest Georgian epigraphic monument is carved on the southern facade of the church named after Mni, on the first stone from the foundation. The inscription is dated to the 10th century and tells the history of the construction of the temple (Gagoshidze, 2021: 129-130). In the material found during the expedition, we have inscriptions written in Asomaturli and Mkhedral script and some unpainted graphemes.

Although Georgian inscriptions of the Middle Ages are represented in a small number, we emphasize that in this era, no other written culture, except Georgian, can be read in the

epigraphy of the region. Tombstone epitaphs found in Truso and Mni valleys are an echo of the collective cultural identity of the local population and should be considered as one of its powerful factors.

Decorating the grave and carving epitaphs is a part of the culture of many countries and it is directly related to the traditional existence of the society of that country, the attitude towards the deceased person and death in general. But, as the aesthetics of the philosophical understanding of life and death, it has a much different value, in its traditional existence it is a natural, unadorned artifact of people's mentality and cultural identity. The language, script, content of the text and attitude to death (death or death, deceased or dead) of the tombstone epitaphs with nations of different ethnopsychologies are obviously indicative of different cultures and identities (Akhaladze, 2021: 57). The stone epitaphs of Truso and Mna gorges are the best guardians of the cultural identity of the dead in our symbol-laden world, as "grave seals are unbreakable".

The Gudiashvili, Mirakashvili, Sukhishvili, as well as the Gudievs, Mirakaevs, Kukievs and others named in the tombstone epitaphs identified at the Mna, Abano, Shevardeni, Okrokana burial grounds are surnames of Georgian origin. The mason of each of them knows the Georgian tradition of carving the epitaph, follows the rules, or makes the same mistakes as the masons of other parts of Georgia.

It is the social nature of culture to reflect the treasure of socially inherited collective knowledge that an individual receives from his or her group. Truso epitaphs are a treasure of inherited collective knowledge, preserved in the Georgian language, Georgian script, epitaph text rendering - decoration methods and content, and represent the most solid and irreplaceable symbols of the ethno-psychological and cultural identity of their owners. These symbols of identity cannot be changed by artificially created and replaced new symbols, history cannot interfere with these symbols (Akhaladze, 2021: 58).

The written monuments of Truso and Mna gorges clearly indicate that for centuries, Truso was the area of spread of Georgian written culture. Moreover, from the paleographic point of view, Truso, as a historical-geographic region of the mountain of Georgia, created a peculiar, local variant of the stone calligraphy school. An example of this local variant is the equestrian inscription on the Truso stele, in which the master tells about the "seat of the archangel". The inscriptions written in the Mkhedruli alphabet of the Truso and Mna gorges of the next period are an imitation of the alphabet recorded in the inscription of the Truso stele.

As for the Russian-language tombstone epitaphs, they are dated to the 70s of the XIX century and are mostly inscriptions from the Soviet period.

The process and dynamics of population changes in the Trusso gorge over the centuries were naturally reflected in the written culture of the region, which is represented in different centuries, with different frequencies, or not at all. Despite these changes, the Georgian script and Georgian written culture were dominant in Trusso as one of the main characteristics of the collective cultural identity of the population of this region.

From the point of view of the cultural identity of the population, interesting materials are presented in the population **census books**. Censuses of the mountain population of East Georgia were conducted in 1804, 1816, 1831, 1842, 1860, 1873 and 1886. Some questionnaires presented in the censuses provide an interesting picture, for example, in the census of 1842, in the religion column of the population of the villages of Trusso, everyone wrote Georgian and Greek-Georgian religion. In the family lists compiled in 1886, **Georgian** and **Ossetian** are written as the home and spoken languages of the population of Trusso valley; it is also indicated that they do not know the Russian (state) language. Census-like data reflect the real historical picture and clearly show the values around which the population of the region unites. It does not matter if this ethnic group came to the region or not, it is a fact that until the 60s-80s of the 19th century, the defining factor of the national identity of the population of Trusso was Georgian. Later, under Russification, the situation changes.

From the point of view of identity research, the dynamics and direction of migration processes preserved in cameral descriptions are interesting. From the censuses, it can be seen that Truso is gradually disappearing, which has been noticeable since the 40s of the XIX century, when the direction of population migration to the south, to other historical regions of Georgia, is much more active than to the north, in the territory of historical Ossetia. In this case, too, we are dealing with a certain peculiarity of the identity of the population of Trusso, when the identity was not based on ethnic, but cultural factors, or such strong markers of ethnic identity as statehood, onomastic and toponymic material, customs and traditions, etc. were preserved in the collective historical memory of the population of Trusso.

It seems that this type of identity markers determined the traditional features of the Georgian-Ossetian cultural relationship among the population of Truso. In this regard, interesting information is provided by the "metric books", i.e. church records (1828-1917), which shed light on the religious situation in the Trusso gorge, the Georgian-Ossetian kinship and baptismal ties.

As a result of the processing of documents, it was established that in the metric books and chamber censuses (population census by Russian officials). of 1804, 1816, 1860, the residents of Trusso are registered with suffixed surnames, which is a special indicator of ethnic and cultural belonging. For example: Gudiashvili, Tsabolishvili, Karashvili, Bizikishvili, Sapiashvili can be found in village **Abano**; in **Burmasigi** - Tuashvili, Urtashvili, Tavashvili,



Bulatsishvili; in **Gimara** - Berozishvili, Botsoshvili; in **Lower Desi and Upper Desi** - Khamitsashvili/Khamtsashvili, Mirikishvili, Kaziashvili, Tatarashvili, Salbishvili, in **Zakagori** - Ketoshvili; in **Mna** - Kokoshvili, Kasashvili, Abashvili, Kusashvili, in **Tepi** - Kalagishvili, in **Suatisi** - Kasashvili, Sambegishvili, Eloshvili, Batsiashvili, etc. Many examples can be cited. In the metric books since the 1890s, there has been a massive transformation of surnames by adding the Russian -ov //-ev suffixes. We have similar cases in the chamber censuses of 1832, 1842, 1873 and family lists of 1886 (in general, this trend can be observed throughout Georgia, we have similar examples in the records of Khevi parishes' metric books and chamber censuses).

There are common male and female names in Georgia, such as: **Farnaoz, Levan, Zakaria, David/Datiko, Kristopore, Kaplani, Luarsab, Tedo, Onise, Niko, Ninia, Lekso, Sandro, Bichiko/Chichiko, Glakha, Gigo, Naskisa, Ioba, Berdia, Iliko** and others. Women's names - **Nino, Nutsa, Ninutsa, Tekle, Ketevani, Keke/Kekelo, Pepelo, Tinatini/Tina, Tamari, Magdana, Melania, Babale, Makrine, Maya/Maiko/Mako, Malia, Khoreshan, Kaltamdze, Lela, Rusudani, Nato, Sabeda, Eliso**, from the names of women, we came up with the name **Dedopali/Dedopala, Kali**, etc. The man's name came to us as **Eristavi**, which must come from the institute of the Georgian state employee - Eristavi. Also in the name of a man - **Bazali**, which is still recorded as a surname in one of the villages of Kazbegi municipality.

Baptismal ties were revealed between the population of Trusso and Georgians. In order to better study this issue, we also got acquainted with the records of the metric books of Khevi parishes - Stepantsminda, Sno, Sioni and Kanobi. Interesting facts were revealed, in particular: in the records of the early years, 1828-1830, the facts of the baptism of the population of Trusso by the Georgian can be found massively.

For example: in 1828, the nobleman Luarsab Purtseladze, who lived in the village of Basilani, Kobi parish, was mentioned as the godfather of Gabriel Abashvili's son Ivane (foundation 489, inscription 6, document N73). According to the report of the same year, the godfather of the children of Giorgi Meteshvili (sic) living in Naokavi was Ninia Nazgaidze living in Mleta. Gudiashvili's son Luarsab, who lived in Okrokana, is named as the godfather of Glakha Tchkariuli [Tchkareuli], who lived in Goriskikhe; in 1828, the children of Simon Bizikishvili living in Abano Parish were baptized by Martia Kurkumul living in Kanobi. In the same year and in the same parish, Glakha Kobiashvili is mentioned as the godfather of Tomas Bochoshvili's daughter Sophia. The same Glakha Kobiashvili was baptized in 1828 by the son of Giorgi Bulachishvili, Mikhail, who lived in Abano parish. In 1828, Theodore Nazarishvili is mentioned as the godfather of Berozishvili Gogia's daughter Salome, who lived in Abano parish. In 1828, Nino, the daughter of Kazibeg Sapishvili, who lived in Abano Parish, was the godfather of Giorgi Eloshvili, who lived in Goriskikhe. In 1828, Ninia Nazgaidze is



mentioned as the godfather of Giorgi Eloshvili's son Ivane living in Savatisi of the same parish. In 1828 Giorgi Gedevanov [Gedevanishvili] living in Gremishkhevi was baptized by Sophia, daughter of Ivane Sapishvili living in Abano parish. In 1829, Chabelashvili Zakaria's son Alex, who lived in the same parish, was mentioned as the godfather of Glakha Tchkareuli, who lived in Goriskikhe. In 1829, Giorgi Tchkareuli, who lived in the same Goriskikhe, baptized Barbara, the daughter of Ivane Sapishvili, who lived in Abano. 1829 In 1829, Ivane Kurkumul, who lived in Kanobi, was named as the godfather of Svimon, the grandson of Chabat, who lived in the village of Abano. In 1829, Martia Gogishvili, who lived in Khurtisi, baptized the granddaughter of Kobal, who lived in the village of Ukhata, Kobi Parish. In 1830, Batasshvili's son Davit living in Kobi was baptized by Oman Davitasshvili living in Sioni. In 1830, the son of Mrikashvili [Mirakishvili] Ioseb, who lived in the village of Ukhata, baptized Ninia Nagzaidze, who lived in Mleta, etc. (Foundation 489, inscription 6, document N120).

The myronic kinship ties of the population of Trusso with the population of Khevi and other parts of Georgia seem intense in later years. According to information from 1865, Giorgi, the son of Umar Kalagishvili, who lived in the village of Tepi, Abano parish, was baptized by Svimon Tuchashvili, who lived in Khurtisi (fund 489, inscription 6, document N1813). At the same time Svimon Tuchashvili baptized Ivane Kasashvili's son Estate living in Suatisi (fund 489, inscription 6, document N1813). In 1867, Bera Gianishvili, a resident of Kharkheti, is mentioned as the godfather of the son of Eprem Berozishvili, a resident of Gimara village, Abano parish (fund 489, inscription 6, document N1910). In 1869, the godfather of Tsopana Kokashvili's son Efim living in village Ketrisi was Glakha Khuroshvili living in Frezeti (fund 489, inscription 6, document #2109). Mikheil Kobaidze, the son of Guda Kalagishvili, living in the village of Tepi, Abano Parish, was baptized by Mikheil Kobaidze, living in Chirik (fund 489, inscription 6, document N2121). According to information from 1867, the godfather of the daughter of Duda Zachiev, who lived in the village of Basilani, Kobi parish, was Iagor Garsevanov [Garsevanishvili], who lived in the village of Pavleuri (fund 489, inscription 6, document N1910.). In 1867, the daughter of Duda Tavashvili, living in Kobi, baptized Isak Chopikashvili, living in Stepantsminda (the same document). From the metric book of the same year, it is known that the son of Glakha Kokashvili living in village Shavardeni was baptized by Simon Tuchashvili living in Khurtisi (same document). In 1867, the godfather of Aleksii Karashvili's son, Solomon, who lived in the village of Basilani, Kobi parish, was named Soloman Pitskhelauri, a resident of Ananuri and a trader in Kobi (the same document). The daughter of Dzanbol Agaev living in the village of Naokavi of the same parish was baptized by Agdgomela Zakaidze living in Kaishauri (fund 489, inscription 6, document N2109). According to the 1869 records of the Kobi parish, Tevdore Kavtarov [Kavtaradze] living in Chadistsikhe is named as the godfather of Toti Tuaev's son David living in Zemo Ukhata (the same

document). According to the report of 1870, Vasil Epkhoshvili, who lived in Stepantsminda, is named as the godfather of the daughter of Grigol Tuaev, who lived in Kobi, and the same Vasil Epkhoshvili is baptized by Salome, the daughter of Ivane Tuaev, who lived in Kobi (fund 489, inscription 6, document #2121). etc. Many facts of baptism in the parishes of Kobi and Abano are confirmed, which can also be found at the beginning of the 20th century, we limited ourselves to only a few examples.

If in the first half of the 19th century we have facts of the baptism of Ossetians by the Georgians in most cases, from the second half the cases of the baptism of Georgians by the Ossetians are also confirmed. Such facts are confirmed in many places, for example, in Garbani, Sno, Okrokana, Gimara and other villages.

According to the ecclesiastical arrangement, the population of Trusso was divided into Abano and Kobi parishes, in exceptional cases, the clergy of the other Khevi parishes - Stepantsminda, Sno, Sioni, and Kanobi - held church services in Abano and Kobi parishes. It can be said that the church books are a rich source for studying the kinship relations of the population living in the Trusso gorge, their marriages, their nationalities, their social origin, status, origin, or mixed marriage.

After studying the metrical books, interesting features of the Georgian-Ossetian cultural relationship emerged, namely:

- ✓ It turned out that in the parishes of Kobi and Abano, until the beginning of the 20th century, church services were performed in Georgian by Georgian clergymen. In the parishes of Abano and Kobi, there are cases when the clergy of the other parishes of Khevi, Stepantsminda, Sno, Sioni, and Kanobi temporarily served the parish without a priest.
- ✓ By studying the marriage acts, it was found out that in the early years, most of the marriages took place among the population of Trusso gorge, and in the later period, mixed marriages gradually increased.
- ✓ Observing the metric books revealed another interesting fact: surnames that are recorded in Trusso and in the villages of Khevi and Mtiuleti, all these surnames living in Trusso are registered as Ossetians, while the residents of Khevi villages are registered as Georgians, which are an integral part of the Georgian ethnic world as confirmed by other historical sources.
- ✓ The study of the metrical books showed us that there was a massive linguistic and ethnic assimilation of the population that came to Trusso, both due to mixed families with Georgians, and due to the policy of the Russification initiated by the Russian Empire.

Clear stories of the cultural identity of the population can be seen in the archival materials of the "Ossetian Theological Commission" (1774-1861) and the "Society for the Restoration of Orthodox Christianity in the Caucasus" (1863-1917), the Foundation of the Exarch of Georgia. These materials tell us not only about the religious situation in the 19th century Trusso Gorge, but also about the identity of the clergy and parishioners, their social, economic, religious and educational life. Based on the content, the archival materials of the named foundations can be grouped as follows: a) archival materials about clergymen working in the Trusso Gorge; b) archival materials about the state of churches and monasteries in Trusso Gorge; c) archival materials about the Christianization of Ossetians; d) various archival materials of a private nature (foundation No. 488, inscription 1, document No. 2941, etc.). Based on the processed archival documents, we can draw the following conclusions:

- ✓ In the 19th century, Christian Ossetians lived in the Trusso Gorge together with the Orthodox Georgian population;
- ✓ Georgian clergy worked for public good in the gorge, but there was a lack of clergy in the parishes;
- ✓ Georgian clerics who did not know Ossetian and Russian languages lived and worked mainly in Trusso Gorge, therefore Christian services were held in Georgian;
- ✓ Due to the harsh climatic conditions, clergymen often arbitrarily abandoned their parishes;
- ✓ The newly Christianized Ossetians needed a church and clergy to satisfy their religious needs;
- ✓ The situation was difficult from the point of view of education as well; there were no schools where one could receive church education, therefore the population of the gorge and the clergy suffered from a lack of church books;
- ✓ The churches of the Trusso gorge parish were in a deplorable condition. It was necessary to restore and strengthen the monuments.

Thus, based on the interdisciplinary studies of Trusso, the main characteristics of ethnic and cultural identity of Georgians and the main factors of collective historical memory, ethno-cultural and religious identity, moods conveyed by artifacts of the past and XIX-XX centuries stories of Georgian-Ossetian relations were revealed.

**დამოწმებული საარქივო მასალა და ლიტერატურა:**

**საარქივო მასალები:**

ფონდი 489 - საქართველო-იმერეთის სინოდალური კანტორა, საქართველოს ეროვნული საისტორიო ცენტრალური არქივი.

- ფონდი №488 - საქართველოს ეგზარქოსის კანცელარია, საქართველოს ეროვნული საისტორიო ცენტრალური არქივი.
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