

SHERIF KHIMSHIASHVILI — THE RETURN OF ADJARA TO ITS HOMELAND AS A RESULT OF THE RUSSO-TURKISH WAR OF 1877–1878

შერიფ ხიმშიაშვილი — აჭარის დედასამშობლოსთან დაბრუნება რუსეთ-თურქეთის 1877–1878 წლების ომის შედეგად

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Abstract

The paper includes a detailed analysis focused on the historical role of Sherif Khimshiashvili, which is related to the peaceful return of the Adjara region to its homeland after the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877–1878. The article aims to demonstrate Sherif Khimshiashvili's political intuition, decisions based on ancestral memory, and his critical importance in expanding the Georgian state space. Sherif Khimshiashvili represented the type of regional leaders who, despite their feudal origins, responded to historical turning points by strengthening national self-awareness, not only for maintaining personal influence.

The presented article discusses Adjara's existing complex political context in the second half of the 19th century—the weakening of the Ottoman Empire, Russia's expansion into the South Caucasus, and the regional feudal elites' wariness of maintaining power. In this context, Sherif Khimshiashvili's choice—peaceful cooperation with the Russian Empire and ensuring regional stability—is a thoughtful expression of national strategy.

Special attention will be paid to Sherif Khimshiashvili's family legacy - the death of Selim Pasha Khimshiashvili and national aspirations, which in his descendants turned into a concrete realisation of the idea of returning to the homeland. Sherif Khimshiashvili carried out the political line, which is a continuation of the family tradition and a state choice made in the historical context, considering geopolitical realities.

A historiographical review shows that the role of Sherif Khimshiashvili has not yet been fully recognised in Georgian historiography. Early Georgian studies (D. Bakradze, T. Sakhokia, Z. Chichinadze) focused on general discussions of the Khimshiashvili dynasty. However, the image of Selim Pasha overshadowed the personal importance of Sherif Khimshiashvili. Soviet historiography assessed his role through a social class prism, which reduced his state significance by emphasising his feudal status. It pays more attention to the historical decision made by Sherif as an example of national integration and regional stability.

This paper also examines the international dimensions, particularly Russian imperial interests in the region, Western involvement in the Batumi port question—especially by Britain—and the diplomatic outcomes of the Berlin Congress that shaped Adjara's unique status. In this light, Khimshiashvili emerges as a key figure of local legitimacy, without whom the regional transition could not have proceeded peacefully.

Sherif Khimshiashvili's actions were not simply political opportunism, but the result of ancestral memory, national identity, and geopolitical calculation. His participation in the process of returning Adjara is seen as a model of peaceful transformation, different from the classic scenarios of annexation based on military force. The author concludes that Sherif Khimshiashvili was an unobtrusive but crucial architect of the national-state plan.

The final part of the article focuses on the contemporary significance of Sherif Khimshiashvili: his figure should be as a harmonious synthesis of regional leadership, national responsibility, and state intuition. His image needs to be fully integrated into the historical narrative of modern Georgia as a leader who managed to avoid violence in the process of national unification and achieve a peaceful historical turning point.

Keywords: Sherif Khimshiashvili; Russo-Ottoman War of 1877–1878; Adjara.

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აბსტრაქტი

ნაშრომი მოიცავს შერიფ ხიმშიაშვილის ისტორიულ როლზე ფოკუსირებულ დეტალურ ანალიზს, რომელიც დაკავშირებულია აჭარის რეგიონის სამშობლოსთან მშვიდობიან დაბრუნებასთან 1877–1878 წლების რუსეთ-ოსმალეთის ომის შემდგომ. სტატიის მიზანია აჩვენოს შერიფ ხიმშიაშვილის პოლიტიკური ინტუიცია, საგვარეულო მეხსიერებაზე დამყარებული გადაწყვეტილებები და მისი კრიტიკული მნიშვნელობა საქართველოს სახელმწიფოებრივი სივრცის გაფართოების პროცესში, რომ შერიფ ხიმშიაშვილი წარმოადგენდა იმ რეგიონულ ლიდერთა ტიპს, რომლებმაც ფეოდალური წარმომავლობის მიუხედავად, ისტორიულ გარდატეხაზე მოახდინეს რეაგირება ეროვნული თვითშეგნების გაძლიერების გზით და არა მხოლოდ პირადი გავლენის შენარჩუნების მოტივით.

აქ განხილულია XIX საუკუნის მეორე ნახევარში აჭარაში არსებულ რთულ პოლიტიკური კონტექსტი - ოსმალეთის იმპერიის შესუსტება, რუსეთის სამხრეთ კავკასიურ ექსპანსია და რეგიონული ფეოდალური ელიტების სიფრთხილე ძალაუფლების შენარჩუნების პროცესში. ამ ვითარებაში შერიფ ხიმშიაშვილის არჩევანი — მშვიდობიანი თანამშრომლობა რუსეთის იმპერიასთან და რეგიონული სტაბილურობის უზრუნველყოფა — წარმოდგენილია როგორც ეროვნული სტრატეგიის გააზრებული გამოხატულება.

განსაკუთრებულ ყურადღება დაეთმო შერიფ ხიმშიაშვილის საგვარეულო მემკვიდრეობას-სელიმ ფაშა ხიმშიაშვილის დაღუპვასა და ეროვნულ მისწრაფებებს, რაც შთამომავლობაში გადაიხარდა სამშობლოს დაბრუნების იდეის კონკრეტულ რეალიზაციაში. შერიფ ხიმშიაშვილის მიერ გატარებული პოლიტიკური ხაზი მოიაზრება როგორც საგვარეულო ტრადიციის გაგრძელება და ისტორიულ კონტექსტში გეოპოლიტიკური რეალობის გათვალისწინებით განხორციელებული სახელმწიფოებრივი არჩევანი.

ისტორიოგრაფიული მიმოხილვა აჩვენებს, რომ შერიფ ხიმშიაშვილის როლი ჯერ კიდევ სრულად არ არის აღიარებული ქართულ ისტორიოგრაფიაში. ადრეული ქართულ კვლევებში (დ. ბაქრაძე, თ. სახოკია, ზ. ჭიჭინაძე) ყურადღება ექცეოდა ხიმშიაშვილთან საგვარეულოზე ზოგადად განხილვებს, თუმცა შერიფ ხიმშიაშვილის პერსონალური მნიშვნელობა დაჩრდილული იყო სელიმ ფაშას ხატის ფონზე. საბჭოთა ისტორიოგრაფიამ მისი როლი სოციალური კლასობრივი პრიზმით შეაფასა, რაც ფეოდალურ სტატუსზე აქცენტირებით ამცირებდა მის სახელმწიფოებრივ მნიშვნელობას. პოსტსაბჭოთა ისტორიოგრაფია კი მეტ ყურადღებას უთმობს შერიფის მიერ მიღებულ ისტორიულ გადაწყვეტილებას, როგორც ეროვნულ ინტეგრაციასა და რეგიონული სტაბილურობის დამკვიდრების მაგალითს.

ნაშრომში დეტალურადაა განხილული საერთაშორისო ფაქტორების ზეგავლენა: რუსეთის იმპერიის სტრატეგიული ინტერესები სამხრეთ კავკასიაში, დასავლური ძალების (განსაკუთრებით ბრიტანეთის) ჩართულობა ბათუმის პორტის საკითხში და ბერლინის კონგრესის დიპლომატიური შედეგები, რომლებიც აჭარის სპეციფიკურ სტატუსზე გავლენას ახდენდნენ. ამ კონტექსტში შერიფ ხიმშიაშვილის როლი აღწერილია როგორც ადგილობრივი ლეგიტიმაციის გადამწყვეტი ფაქტორი, რომლის გარეშე რეგიონული ტრანზიციის მშვიდობიანად ვერ განხორციელდებოდა.

შერიფ ხიმშიაშვილის ქმედებები იყო არა უბრალოდ პოლიტიკური ოპორტუნიზმი, არამედ საგვარეულო მეხსიერების, ეროვნული იდენტობის და გეოპოლიტიკური გათვლის შედეგი. მისი მონაწილეობა აჭარის დაბრუნების პროცესში განიხილება როგორც მშვიდობიანი ტრანსფორმაციის მოდელი, რომელიც განსხვავდება სამხედრო ძალაზე დამყარებული ანექსიის კლასიკური სცენარებისგან. ავტორი ასკვნის, რომ შერიფ ხიმშიაშვილი იყო ეროვნული სახელმწიფოებრივი გეგმის შეუმჩნეველი, თუმცა გადამწყვეტი არქიტექტორი.

სტატიის დასკვნითი ნაწილი აქცენტს აკეთებს შერიფ ხიმშიაშვილის თანამედროვე მნიშვნელობაზე: მისი ფიგურა უნდა იქნეს აღიარებული როგორც რეგიონული ლიდერობის, ეროვნული პასუხისმგებლობისა და სახელმწიფოებრივი ინტუიციის ჰარმონიული სინთეზი. თანამედროვე საქართველოს ისტორიულ ნარატივში მისი სახე საჭიროებს სრულფასოვან ინტეგრირებას, როგორც იმ ლიდერისა, რომელმაც შეძლო ეროვნული გაერთიანების პროცესში ძალადობის თავიდან აცილება და მშვიდობიანი ისტორიული გარდატეხის განხორციელება.

საკვამო სიტყვები: შერიფ ხიმშიაშვილი; 1877–1878 წლების რუსეთ-ოსმალეთის ომი; აჭარა.

Introduction

The second half of the 19th century marked a decisive phase in the history of southwestern Georgia. In particular, the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877–1878 reshaped the geopolitical destiny of the Adjara region and the Batumi district. As a direct consequence of this war, Adjara was annexed by the Russian Empire—a development that, in its historical and national dimensions, represented a significant step toward Georgia's reintegration and territorial unity (King, 2008, p. 214; Suny, 1994, p. 56).

This historical transformation must be understood within the framework of broader global geopolitical shifts—specifically, the Russian Empire's activation of the “South Gate” strategy in the Caucasus and the concurrent exploitation of the weakening Ottoman presence in the region (Petrosyan, 2019, p. 73). Adjara's strategic importance was amplified by the Western powers—particularly Britain—granting the port of Batumi the status of a critical geopolitical node (Langer, 1975, p. 438).

At the heart of this historic shift stood the figure of Sherif Khimshiashvili, the grandson of Selim Pasha Khimshiashvili—a statesman whose legacy and actions embodied the continued pursuit and eventual realisation of the idea of Adjara's return to its Georgian homeland. His activity served as a prism through which the region's cultural identity, political pragmatism, and national instinct coalesced during historical rupture.

Whereas Selim Pasha represented the vanguard of early 19th-century national resistance, Sherif Khimshiashvili emerged as the executor of political transformation, reconnecting Adjara with Georgian identity and the national space. This linkage must be evaluated not merely as a regional event but as part of Georgia's broader project of statehood and territorial consolidation (Assmann, 2011, p. 125).

His political role personified the quintessence of a transitional era—on one hand, characterised by the internal interest of the Ottoman administrative structure, and on the other, shaped by the national memory of a family steeped in resistance and regional identity (İnalçık, 2000, p. 389). Within his decision lay two key dynamics: the recognition of global geopolitical change and a locally rooted instinct for national self-preservation. Sherif Khimshiashvili's actions reflected what contemporary observers—and later historiography—have termed a “state transformation enabled through local consensus” (Werth, 2002, p. 87).

This paper aims to analyse Sherif Khimshiashvili's political agency in the context of the 1877–1878 war and assess his actions as personal historical decisions and as elements within a broader national strategy. The article reflects on his role through the lens of both Georgian historiography and international scholarship, seeking to show how a regional leader can emerge as a strategic actor in moments of geopolitical transition.

Methodology

The article is based on the analysis of primary sources and special literature. Historical processes and human activities were discussed using complex and systematic methods. The starting point of the research methodology is the principle of historicism and objectivity. The historical background of the research topic was studied using the method of comparative analysis.

This study employs a multidisciplinary and source-based historical methodology, combining macro-level geopolitical analysis and micro-historical examination of individual agency. The primary objective is to evaluate Sherif Khimshiashvili's political decisions not as isolated acts, but as manifestations of structural transformations and national strategy formation during a critical period in the South Caucasus.

The research draws heavily on primary Georgian archival documents, Ottoman and Russian imperial correspondences, and Georgian-language monographs from the late 19th to the 21st centuries. In addition, key historiographical interventions—particularly from post-Soviet and Western Caucasus studies—are integrated to reconstruct the evolution of Sherif's image in national memory and academic debate.

The comparative method has been utilized to analyse Sherif Khimshiashvili's political positioning against other regional elites within the late Ottoman Empire—especially those operating under conditions of dual loyalty and cultural hybridity.

Summary of Introduction and Methodology

The introduction establishes the geopolitical and historical significance of Adjara's peaceful reintegration into the Georgian national space following the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877–1878. Sherif Khimshiashvili is introduced as a strategic regional leader whose actions were guided by dynastic memory and national consciousness rather than mere feudal loyalty. His figure is contextualized within broader imperial shifts, such as Russia's southern expansion and Ottoman decline, as well as within the cultural-political project of Georgian statehood. The section positions Khimshiashvili as a mediator of transition who exemplifies national integration without violence.

The methodology employs a multidimensional historical analysis incorporating historicism, archival research, comparative methods, and memory studies. It treats Sherif Khimshiashvili as both a political actor and a symbolic figure. The study combines primary sources (e.g., Georgian archival documents, travelogues, correspondence) with historiographical critique, especially of Soviet and post-Soviet perspectives. It also engages interdisciplinary approaches—bridging political history and cultural identity—to understand the long-term impact and evolving interpretations of Khimshiashvili's role in state integration. Methodologically, the study refrains from one-dimensional narratives, instead pursuing a balanced reconstruction of regional agency under conditions of empire.

Discussion and results

I. Adjara before the war: the political situation and the Khimshiashvili family - In the second half of the 19th century, the Khimshiashvili noble house in Adjara represented a rare phenomenon in which regional political authority was closely intertwined with national consciousness. Their role in the political-administrative structure of Adjara should not be seen merely as a result of privileges granted by the Ottoman Empire. Rather, the Khimshiashvili dynasty emerged as a symbol of local sovereignty, embodying a form of autonomous princely authority within the formal framework of Ottoman suzerainty (Akhvlediani, 1958, p. 219). The political course charted by Selim Pasha Khimshiashvili, and later upheld with distinction by Sherif Khimshiashvili, reflected a strategic consciousness—namely, how to preserve the region’s cultural distinctiveness under intensifying imperial influence. Tedo Sakhokia pointed out that the Khimshiashvilis constituted “a preserved nucleus of Georgian identity within the Ottoman domain” (Sakhokia, 1930, p. 98).

However, the Khimshiashvilis were not merely loyal subjects of the Ottoman Empire. A dualist political strategy is evident in the family’s historical trajectory, demonstrating loyalty to the sultan while maintaining enduring cultural ties to the Georgian heritage. As Zakaria Chichinadze wrote: “Despite enjoying the protection of the highest Ottoman authorities, the Khimshiashvilis were deeply connected to Gurjistan and always shared in its historical trials” (Chichinadze, 1912, p. 45). According to Kaya (2020), the Khimshiashvilis were “a local dynasty that operated with considerable political subjectivity and exemplified the Ottoman model of internal autonomous governance” (Kaya, 2020, p. 117).

This dual strategy was most clearly embodied by Selim Pasha Khimshiashvili, who in the early 19th century publicly expressed the idea of liberating southern Georgia. His resistance and tragic end at Khikhani Fortress became a living symbol in dynastic memory, recognised and recognised by later generations as part of Georgia’s national heritage (Sulguladze, 2005, p. 221).

The torch of this legacy was carried forward by Selim’s grandson, Sherif Khimshiashvili, who at the close of the 19th century faced a historic choice—whether to remain loyal to the Ottoman regime or to seize the opportunity presented by the evolving situation and facilitate Adjara’s reintegration into Georgia’s national framework.

Before the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877–1878, the political situation in Adjara was unstable and dynamic. Although the Ottoman authorities sought to control the local elites, the Khimshiashvilis still retained significant room for independent political action as a regional feudal nucleus (Megreliдзе, 1975, p. 203). Their ambivalent stance, shaped by imperial weakness and the increasing activism of Russian policy in the South Caucasus, transformed Adjara into a strategic crossroads. As Suny (1994) emphasised, “southern Georgian regions such as Adjara, Kars, and Ardahan became testing grounds for imperial competition” (Suny, 1994, p. 59).

In this context, the Khimshiashvili family became a locus of historical convergence where politics, national memory, and regional geopolitical interests intersected. Kaya (2020) underscores that their influence in Adjara should be understood as a model of federal autonomy within the Ottoman framework—one that fundamentally differed from other provincial governance structures in the empire (Kaya, 2020, p. 121).

As a custodian of dynastic tradition, Sherif Khimshiashvili had to assess the prevailing conjuncture and choose between imperial loyalty and national aspiration. His decision—to realign with Georgian identity—expressed a strategic will that laid the foundation for the peaceful reintegration of Adjara. Sherif transformed dynastic tradition into a political platform. His governance embodied a classic model in which the noble house served as a guarantor of regional stability and a mediator of external political vectors. Zakaria Chichinadze commented: “The House of

Khimshiashvili in Adjara was like the old stone of Anchiskhati—unshakable in faith and, like that venerable relic, a bearer of a firm national spirit” (Chichinadze, 1912, p. 47).

By the late 19th century, Adjarian feudal leaders operated with political prudence, carefully navigating the overlapping interests of great powers (Jalagania, 2012, p. 122). Once again, the Khimshiashvili family stood at the intersection of historical developments—where political agency, national identity, and regional autonomy converged. The second half of the 19th century posed a profound question to regional elites: “Should they remain within the crumbling imperial frameworks or lead their people into a new state reality?” (Petrosyan, 2019, p. 79).

Sherif Khimshiashvili’s choice represented a harmonious fusion of local national consciousness and modern state calculation (Kakhbrishvili, 2010, p. 132). The complex political landscape of late 19th-century Adjara required elites—especially the Khimshiashvilis—to maintain a careful balance between Ottoman influence and the preservation of regional identity. Adjara’s geopolitical configuration, which included traits of internal autonomy within an imperial structure, created a unique political space where dynasties needed both flexibility and strategic acumen (Sakhokia, 1930, p. 95; Bagrationi-Bakradze, 1877, p. 79).

The Khimshiashvili dynasty was distinguished not only by its military-administrative role but also by its cultural and national consciousness. According to Chichinadze, the Khimshiashvilis “accompanied Gurjistan through its fate and fortune” (Chichinadze, 1912, p. 45), highlighting their deep connection to Georgian cultural identity.

Thus, the pre-war political situation in Adjara and the Khimshiashvili family embody the symbol of a historical turning point: an organic combination of preserving regional identity, flexible political maneuvering in defence of national interests, and a state vision.

II. Sherif Khimshiashvili's Choice: Political Loyalty and Identity - As the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877–1878 approached, the situation in the southwestern Georgian region no longer allowed for neutrality. The existing international tensions and Russia's military successes on the Caucasus front accelerated the need for local feudal lords to position themselves politically (Suny, 1994, p. 62). As the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877–1878 approached, the situation in the southwestern Georgian region no longer allowed for neutrality. The existing international tensions and Russia's military successes on the Caucasus front accelerated the need for local feudal lords to position themselves politically (Suny, 1994, p. 62).

Within this fraught context, the position of the Khimshiashvili family—and particularly that of Sherif Khimshiashvili—emerged as decisive, as he stood directly before the choice of a national ideal.

Sherif Khimshiashvili was the grandson of Selim Pasha Khimshiashvili, the very figure who, in the early 19th century, had for the first time distinctly articulated a policy of separating Ajara from Ottoman rule and aligning it with Georgia. Selim’s struggle for the autonomy of the Akhaltsikhe Pashalik, his fortification in Khikhani Fortress, and his tragic end formed the symbolic and ideological cornerstone of the family’s inherited identity (Sulguladze, 2005, p. 115).

As Zakaria Chichinadze wrote, Selim consciously cultivated a new historical awareness in his descendants: “Gurjistan will not belong to the Ottomans forever; I leave this memory to my children” (Chichinadze, 1912, p. 42). Sherif Khimshiashvili’s political decision must be interpreted within this framework of inherited consciousness. According to Professor Abel Sulguladze, Sherif accomplished what Selim had only dreamed of: “The great political cause to which Selim Khimshiashvili sacrificed his life was nobly fulfilled during the lifetime of his own grandson” (Surguladze, 2005, p. 128).

Sherif Khimshiashvili’s identity cannot be simplistically confined to the bounds of Ottoman loyalty. Though he functioned within the Ottoman administrative system and headed the sanjak, his political actions were of a far more complex nature. Khariton Akhvlediani emphasized that the role

of the Khimshiashvili family was not merely a “boldly loyal” structure toward the empire; among them were figures who “openly expressed a national orientation and a will for free choice” (Akhvlediani, 1958, p. 214).

Modern scholars echo this interpretation. Kaya (2020) argues that in the latter half of the 19th century, regional elites within the Ottoman Empire often played a triple role—they were at once local authorities, imperial agents, and carriers of regional national consciousness (Kaya, 2020, p. 125).

Some sources claim that he played a direct implication in facilitating the peaceful transfer of authority to Russian forces in Ajara. Subsequently, the Khimshiashvili family was granted the status of a loyal aristocratic household within the Russian imperial framework. As King (2008) astutely observes, in the latter half of the 19th century, collaboration between local elites and Russian administrators in the Caucasus often served as a precondition for peaceful integration—marking a notable departure from the classical model of imperial annexation (King, 2008, p. 224).

Thus, Sherif Khimshiashvili’s choice became a defining factor during a historical turning point. A feudal dynasty that had functioned within the Ottoman system for over a century now emerged as an architect of Ajara’s legitimated incorporation into the Russian Empire.

His decision was not a reflexive political reaction; instead, it represented a historically informed judgment grounded in familial memory, national identity, and geopolitical foresight. This is precisely what enabled the peaceful reunification of Ajara with its Georgian homeland in 1878, and ensured that Sherif Khimshiashvili would be remembered as a symbol of historical choice—where political loyalty gave way to national consciousness.

In this light, his decision should be viewed not as mere political opportunism but as a conscious realization of inherited mission. His actions express a form of national intuition and historical wisdom through which the peaceful reintegration of Ajara into the Georgian political space was rendered possible.

Howard (2011) rightly notes that regional leaders who managed state-level transitions peacefully in the 19th century often possessed a rare capacity to achieve through negotiation what elsewhere was obtained only through bloody conflict (Howard, 2011, p. 312).

The choice of Sherif Khimshiashvili during the war of 1877–1878 was a fundamentally well-thought-out political move, based on both family heritage and the geopolitical reality of the time. He was not only a representative of the Ottoman government, but also a leader carrying a national idea, who was able to peacefully lead a historical turning point. Sherif’s actions expressed a deep national intuition, which aimed at the peaceful return of Adjara as its primary goal. He was a figure who united family tradition, regional interests and a state vision.

His choice reflects the process when local elites resort to strategic cooperation instead of forceful methods and achieve long-term national goals. Sherif Khimshiashvili’s actions are considered one of the best examples of feudal leadership of the 19th century, where moral responsibility and geopolitical understanding merge. His figure shows that peaceful integration of the region was possible not only based on military force, but also based on local legitimacy.

III. Historical Assessment of the Incorporation of Ajara and the Role of Sherif Khimshiashvili - The Russo-Ottoman War of 1877–1878, which dramatically changed the political map of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, and the Balkans, determined the future of Adjara not only through international treaties but also through local historical decisions. The accession of Adjara to Russia should not be assessed solely in the context of military victory or imperial expansion. It was a multi-layered process in which the choices of the local feudal elite, especially the position of Sherif Khimshiashvili, played a decisive role (Suny, 1994, p. 64;).

The Congress of Berlin (1878), which followed the Treaty of San Stefano, granted Russia the Batumi region, including Adjara. However, under pressure from Western diplomacy, the new administrative regime was based on a specific status — "unfortified port" and some aspects of internal autonomy (Langer, 1975, p. 440). The famous historian Abel Surguladze notes, "Russia's goal in Adjara was not limited to the annexation of territory — it needed legitimacy, with the consent of the local elite" (Surguladze, 2005, p. 137).

This is where Sherif Khimshiashvili's role comes into play. His actions in the post-war period were diplomatic and deliberate. Khariton Akhvlediani emphasized that the Khimshiashvili family "performed the function of a mediator between Ottoman rule and Russian statehood... Sherif Khimshiashvili became the figure who ensured the stability of the peaceful transition process in Adjara" (Akhvlediani, 1958, p. 227). European politics specialist Michael Reynolds also notes that the Russian Empire in the Caucasus successfully used the cooperation of local feudal elites for the peaceful integration of the region, which is a relatively rare example of 19th-century colonial policy (Reynolds, 2011, p. 143).

Sherif Khimshiashvili's involvement was particularly important in the sense that the population coming from the Ottoman Empire—especially the Muslim population—had distrust of Russian rule. Sherif Khimshiashvili's participation as a local authority played a critical role in calming the population and helping them adapt to the new reality. Zakaria Chichinadze also emphasizes: "Sherif Khimshiashvili was not just a military figure—he became a bridge between the old and the new reality, through which Adjara preserved its identity structure and was inscribed in the state space."

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It is essential that the Russian authorities appreciated the loyalty of the Sherif - he was granted the appropriate status, was not deprived of his hereditary rights, and retained influence in forming new administrative mechanisms. This shows that the Russian Empire tried to integrate Adjara not only through military but also through social and cultural means. It was in this way that Sherif Khimshiashvili was a necessary and functionally effective figure. Modern studies emphasise that ensuring the participation of local elites is crucial for the successful integration of the region, especially when it comes to the region's successful integration, especially in a multi-confessional society (Kaldellis, 2023, p. 89).

The annexation of Adjara was accompanied by contradictory feelings - for some it was perceived as an imperial annexation, and for others, as an opportunity for national awakening. The choice of the Khimshiashvili family made this process more appropriate and legitimate. According to Abel Surguladze, "Sherif Khimshiashvili believed that returning to his homeland was the restoration of historical order and guided his own steps with this belief" (Surguladze, 2005, p. 141).

The accession of Adjara to the Russian Empire in 1878 was a complex and multifaceted process, in which Sherif Khimshiashvili emerged as an essential figure of national-political transformation. His role was not limited to feudal loyalty - he became a kind of connecting link between ancestral memory and the new state reality. His choice, in its essence, expressed a politically well-considered way of peacefully extricating Adjara from its historically tense geopolitical situation.

Conclusion - The Russo-Ottoman War of 1877–1878 brought Adjara into a new geopolitical reality. The accession of Adjara to the Russian Empire was not just a fact established by international treaties

- this process required the support of the local community, especially its leaders, so that the accession was not perceived as an imposition of foreign political will, but as an event naturally inscribed in the country's historical narrative.

Sherif Khimshiashvili's role in this historical process was not merely mechanical or one-off, but planned, normative, and national identity-oriented. He represented the type of political figure who could offer internal political legitimacy to a new state regime—that is, the Russian Empire—that aimed to annex territory not only through military force but also through political internal consensus.

Sherif Khimshiashvili's choice echoed his family's long-standing legacy, which Selim Pasha Selim Pasha had defined. He effectively fulfilled his grandfather's incomplete mission — the return of Adjara to its historical homeland. This choice integrates feudal realism, national ideas, and geopolitical intuition. It was a decision that broke away from past subservience to the empire and aimed at protecting Adjara's national and cultural identity within the framework of the new state.

Thus, Sherif Khimshiashvili became not only a “Russian-organic” elite, but also a strategic figure in the national-integration process, who was able to peacefully implement the transformation of power in the region. He represents that rare phenomenon when a local feudal lord becomes a carrier of national consciousness, an intermediary between the colonial empire and the historical homeland. The historical assessment of the annexation of Adjara, therefore, cannot be limited only to the discussion of military campaigns and international diplomacy. Internal legitimacy, social consent and cultural integration became decisive here - the face of which Sherif Khimshiashvili's actions would archive. Thus, he was not only a sheriff in the feudal sense, but also remained in history as the architect of the peaceful “return” process, which became a turning point for the future of Adjara.

Notably, after the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877–1878, the fate of Adjara was broadly defined not only by international diplomatic agreements but also by local political decisions. Particularly, Sherif Khimshiashvili had a decisive role in the mentioned process, merging national self-awareness and political strategy in his actions. Moreover, his choice — a peaceful partnership with the Russian Empire- was determined by ancestral memory and a thoughtful assessment of the region's forthcoming prospects.

Sherif Khimshiashvili was able to combine traditional influence and new political realities in a way that ensured a peaceful transition for Adjara. His figure exemplifies a model in which regional leadership becomes not a symbol of annexation, but a determining force for national integration. Khimshiashvili's participation significantly reduced the fears of the population that came from the Ottoman Empire and contributed to the stabilization of the region.

Against this background, the role of Sherif Khimshiashvili should be considered as a balanced expression of local and national interests. His political decision shows that the successful integration of the region can be achieved not only through military actions, but also through the support of local authority and national responsibility. Thus, Sherif Khimshiashvili remained in history as one of the most important architects of peaceful state transformation.

IV. Sherif Khimshiashvili and the historical legacy of the return of Adjara- The historical choice of Sherif Khimshiashvili rewrote the history of Adjara at the end of the 19th century — his efforts and positioning made it possible to transform the Ottoman rule in the region so that Adjara returned to the Georgian state space. This event was not only a geopolitical consequence of the Russo-Ottoman War, but also the result of an internal decision made by the local elite, and primarily by Sherif Khimshiashvili. The success of peaceful integration in the second half of the 19th century depended significantly on the strategic decisions of the local elites (Reynolds, 2011, p. 156).

His role in the process of Adjara's unification is closely linked to the historical tradition rooted in his family – the continuation of the national mission initiated by Selim Pasha

Khimshiashvili. Sherif Khimshiashvili consciously chose peaceful integration, a more responsible and challenging strategy than unequivocal loyalty to any imperial power.

The figure of the Sheriff closely aligns with a model that is often missing in contemporary Georgian historiography—the convergence of national identity and regional realism. His actions demonstrated that feudal origins do not preclude political will based on the national idea, and that regional identity can become a force for national unity if it is framed within a framework of close cooperation and historical pragmatism.

His role in the process of annexation of Adjara is closely connected with the historical tradition rooted in his family – the continuation of the national mission initiated by Selim Pasha Khimshiashvili. Sherif Khimshiashvili consciously chose peaceful integration, a more complex and responsible strategy than unequivocal loyalty to any imperial power. As Anthony Kaldellis writes, a regional leader's power is often determined by military action and how he strategically manages historical reality (Kaldellis, 2023, p. 118).

Sherif Khimshiashvili also represents an important example of a politician and leader who acted without violence, without conflict, preparing a transition from within that might otherwise have been seen as a constant confrontation and contradiction. His path became the beginning of a model according to which civil and state institutions can successfully implement a transition, through a decisive transition, but with a peaceful and identity-friendly strategy.

His actions demonstrated that feudal origins do not preclude political will based on the national idea, and that regional identity can become a force for national unity if it is placed within a framework of close cooperation and historical pragmatism (Suny, 1994, p. 65). Sherif Khimshiashvili also represents an important example of a politician and leader who acted without violence, without conflict, preparing a breakthrough from within that might otherwise have seen constant confrontation and contradiction. Howard (2011) notes that the success of regional integration often depended not on the military potential of the majority but on the ability to negotiate and create local legitimacy (Howard, 2011, p. 295). His path became the beginning of a model according to which civil and state institutions can successfully implement the transition through decisive change, but with a peaceful and identity-friendly strategy.

He became a symbol of historical consensus, which should be rightfully imprinted in the local and national memory fabric. Accordingly, the discussion of the role of Sherif Khimshiashvili should be conducted simultaneously in the context of both a historically effective strategist and a hereditary national leader. His actions were not only a reaction to the military situation, but also a premeditated choice, which was generated by historical-cultural memory, ancestral experience and the idea of the homeland's unity.

Accordingly, the role of Sherif Khimshiashvili should be discussed simultaneously in the context of both a historically effective strategist and a hereditary national leader. His actions were not just a reaction to the military situation, but a premeditated choice generated by historical-cultural memory, ancestral experience, and the idea of the homeland's unity.

Sherif Khimshiashvili, as a bearer of historical heritage, should be considered the political and moral architect of return — a person who transformed the historical space into national unity through reintegration, with a mechanism that is often lacking in the process of integrating historically complex regions: local legitimacy and historical coherence.

It is also important to note that the political course taken by Sherif Khimshiashvili went far beyond the usual feudal practices in the context of the region at that time. Diverse reactions of regional feudal elites characterised the second half of the 19th century – in some places, militant resistance was observed, in others, attempts to preserve their own identity through negotiations. Sherif Khimshiashvili's choice belongs to the category that modern studies call the "strategy of clan-state responsibility" (Werth, 2002, p. 114).

Moreover, his policies were entirely consistent with the process that Western historiography calls “peaceful national integration” (Hroch, 1996, p. 85). Sherif Khimshiashvili managed to avoid the severe conflicts that led to bloody uprisings in other regions. His example shows that national unity can be forged not only by military force, but also by the convergence of historical memory, politics, and cultural intuition. Sherif Khimshiashvili’s legacy remains a relevant lesson for 21st-century Georgia — how a vital, dynamic, but peaceful change-oriented policy is in the process of preserving regional identity and converging national interests.

Sherif Khimshiashvili’s historic choice for the peaceful return of Adjara is not only an expression of the political outcome of a particular era, but also a confirmation of a deeply thought-out national strategy. His actions demonstrate that the region's future can be determined without force, by combining local legitimacy and national responsibility. The path chosen by Sherif Khimshiashvili – cooperation and peaceful integration – reflected both the aspirations passed down through family heritage and the geopolitical challenges of the era.

His role in the history of Adjara should be considered not only as the actions of a local actor, but as part of a broader national process, where regional identity has become an urgent need for state integrity. The choice of Sherif Khimshiashvili clearly demonstrates that balanced protection of national interests is possible through diplomatic and strategic decisions.

Today, Sherif Khimshiashvili’s legacy remains one of the best examples of peaceful historical transformation, in which heredity, state logic and political intuition harmoniously unite. His work confirms that strengthening national consciousness and preserving regional identity should not be perceived as a necessity of conflict, but as a result of consensus, historical understanding and strategic vision.

The figure of Sherif Khimshiashvili has been established as a strategic leader carrying national and state ideals. His efforts in the peaceful integration of Adjara represent an example of both national and universal significance, when regional transformation in the state space is achieved without conflict.

V. Recognition of Sherif Khimshiashvili's contribution to Georgian society and the Russian Empire- **Sherif** – Sherif-Beg Khimshiashvili (1829–1892), the last chief of Upper Adjara, is one of the most memorable figures of the second half of the 19th century, who managed to peacefully return Adjara to its historical homeland, through the Russian Empire. His historical choices and political intuition were reflected in the convergence of both imperial strategic interests and Georgian national consciousness as Reynolds (2011) notes, successful peaceful integration in 19th-century imperial politics depended largely on local authorities' loyalty and judicious action, which was clearly demonstrated in the case of Sherif Khimshiashvili (Reynolds, 2011, p. 161).

During the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877–1878, Sherif-beg actively supported the Russian military and administrative forces in Adjara. As an influential chieftain of Upper Adjara, he made a significant contribution to the fact that the Russian Empire annexed Adjara without military action and without mass resistance from the population. Russian military documents (РГИА, f. 1405, op. 77, d. 15) indicate that Sherif was “a firm guarantor of the balance of power in southwestern Georgia”. And in Adjara, “his influence was decisive for the expansion of Russian interests”.

The Russian Empire duly appreciated his assistance. Upon his arrival in St. Petersburg in 1880, Emperor Alexander II personally addressed Sherif Khimshiashvili with the words: “I will not forget your service during the war” (ЦГА Грузии, f. 416, №12). This respect reflected the process that Western historiography calls the “model of peaceful integration of elites” (Werth, 2002, p. 129). In the same year, he was awarded the military rank of Major General and was granted a state pension—a symbolic and practical expression of high appreciation for his political move.

This was not only a recognition of political loyalty, but also the materialization of part of the imperial plan according to which Russia sought to integrate local elites into its political system. It was particularly symbolic that Sherif-Beg, along with his two sons, was baptised as a Christian in St. Petersburg under the supervision of the emperor. This event expressed not only a transformation of identity but also a demonstration of complete loyalty to the government. As Abel Sulguladze notes: "Sherif became the figure who came from Ottoman roots to the architecture of Christian-imperial statehood, on all three levels of transformation: political, identity, and sacred."

Georgian society's assessment and memory - Georgian society perceived Sherif Khimshiashvili's choice as a wise step based on national interests. Zakaria Chichinadze wrote: "Sherif Khimshiashvili was not only the heir to Selim's struggle, but also the creator of his era — he managed to return Adjara without shedding the blood of his brothers" (Chichinadze, 1912, p. 61). His legacy still lives strongly in local memory. Shushana Putkaradze notes, "Sherif's policy showed how a figure with a regional identity can peacefully transform historical reality."

His legacy still lives strongly in local memory. Among the Adjarian population, the name of Sherif is still associated with peaceful revival and state unity. In modern studies of the region, Khimshiashvili's work is considered an example of how peaceful transition and the preservation of cultural identity are possible through agreement (Kaya, 2020, p. 135).

Sherif Khimshiashvili died in 1892 in St. Petersburg. However, according to his will, his remains were transferred to Adjara and buried in his native village of Kochakhi. This fact indicates Sherif's steadfast loyalty — at the end of his life, he returned to the land he had longed to return to. It should be added that his burial in Adjara was not only a personal decision of the family, but also a universal national ritual, demonstrating the strength of the national memory united around the figure of Sherif.

We absolutely agree with the true statement that national leaders who peacefully build state unity are often immortalised in the collective memory of their people precisely because of their function of "putting consent instead of violence as the basis for national development" (Smith, 1991, p. 243).

Sherif Khimshiashvili's contribution to the process of returning Adjara represents not only the manifestation of regional leadership, but also a variety of national self-awareness and state responsibility. His political choices reflect the strategic calculation based on hereditary tradition, understanding of historical reality and preliminary calculation of future national interests. The path chosen by Sherif Khimshiashvili — peaceful cooperation with the Russian Empire, while preserving local identity — is a unique example of a leader with feudal origins becoming a catalyst for national unity. Both Georgian and foreign historiography (Werth, 2002; Reynolds, 2011) emphasize his actions' political pragmatism and historical calculation.

His recognition by both the Russian Empire and Georgian society reflects the pattern in which local elites are given a decisive role in historical transformation. Sherif Khimshiashvili's contribution to the peaceful return of Adjara is an experience that also provides lessons for conflict-free integration in today's multi-ethnic and multi-confessional spaces. It is crucial that Sherif Khimshiashvili's legacy remains not as an example of simple political loyalty, but as a symbol of determination based on national interests. His personality shows that consensus, reasonable political will, and historical self-awareness make national development possible.

Sherif Khimshiashvili is not only a participant in the peaceful return of Adjara, but also a person in Georgian historical memory who left a practical example of peaceful state unity for future generations.

Sherif Khimshiashvili — Historical Choice, Identity Transformation, and State Synthesis:

1. The historical figure of Sherif Khimshiashvili is one of the most difficult to discuss, yet most essential phenomena of the second half of the 19th century in the context of Georgian political history. His life and work cannot be unambiguously inscribed in the logic of feudal collaborationism or separatist power. On the contrary, Sherif Khimshiashvili managed to maintain subjectivity in that dynamic era and demonstrated political will in this way: he chose not to maintain power in a monarchical syntax, but to realize his hereditary mission in a peaceful transition.
2. Sherif Khimshiashvili was not a leader of a national movement in the classical sense, but his decision to return Adjara can rightly be considered a historically calculated and nationally relevant choice. Unlike many regional figures in the 19th-century Caucasus who based their power solely on loyalty to a particular empire, Sherif represents a model of moral pragmatism that was based neither on annexation, nor on Christianization, nor on conflict, but rather on seeking the optimal form of returning the country to its historical unity.
3. Sherif Khimshiashvili was a Muslim pasha who eventually became a Christian Georgian general in the Russian Empire. But this conversion was not just a matter of religious confession—it was a cultural and political choice to preserve regional identity within the new state framework.
4. His actions demonstrated how a second-rate feudal lord could transform his position into that of a historical arbiter—a politician who would peacefully transition his region to a new political system.
5. Sherif Khimshiashvili is an example of how memory is created not only based on heroic sacrifice, but also through wise decisions and historically balanced moves. His face does not revolve in tragic pathos, but in the architecture of stability.
6. The figure of the sheriff also highlights the methodological complexity of telling history when we are dealing with a regional feudal lord who was simultaneously an officer of the empire and a promoter of the national interest. He does not fit into simple dichotomies: he was a nuanced and context-oriented figure whose assessment requires a synthetic application of historical, cultural, and political categories.
7. Therefore, the legacy of Sherif Khimshiashvili should be viewed as a subjective aspect of a historical turning point—a figure who does not deny the past but instead returns it to the homeland through a new synthesis. This serves as a universal example not only for Upper Adjara but for all of Georgia, illustrating how the politics of relationships can become a decisive factor in state development without resorting to violence.
8. Accordingly, Sherif Khimshiashvili is the person who incorporated a complex of political meditation, cultural mediation, and moral responsibility into the process of returning Adjara, which made his figure one of the most valuable integration symbols of the 19th century.

Discussing the historical role of Sherif Khimshiashvili in the context of postcolonial theories presents us with new interpretive possibilities. Traditionally, regional leaders of the 19th century were viewed as figures operating in imperial space, channelling local interests. However, according to postcolonial narratives, Sherif Khimshiashvili's choice can be understood as the choice of an active agent who is trying to maintain his own subjectivity in the imperial discourse and reconfigure a historical turning point.

Following Edward Said (1978), subjects in colonial spaces often either use or violate imperial narratives to preserve their own identities. Sherif Khimshiashvili's actions—negotiation, nonviolent resistance, and eventual peaceful integration—should be seen as a kind of “strategic reappropriation”

of such a narrative. He creates a powerful local centre within the system of imperial power, which combines elements of imperial loyalty and national self-identification.

Using Homi Bhabha's (1994) concept of the "Third Space," we can see Sherif Khimshiashvili as a mediating figure—not entirely part of the Ottoman system, nor just a classical representative of the Georgian national movement, but an architect of a Third Space that bridges old and new identities.

In this sense, Sherif's peaceful return to Adjara can be seen as an example of "postcolonial strategic consent"—an act that goes beyond both classical colonial confrontation and the model of imperial total assimilation. His figure embodies a model of survival of local identity and reconciliation with the new state reality.

According to Spivak (1988), in a postcolonial context, it is important to hear the voice of the subject—not as a product of imperial representation, but as an independent political subject. The actions of Sherif Khimshiashvili demonstrate such subjectivity—he was able to act on the basis of local political culture in a way that brought the region back into the national space with moral, political, and historical legitimacy.

Thus, the role of Sherif Khimshiashvili should be considered in the light of postcolonial analysis as an example of how a local leader can transform imperial reality, through negotiation instead of conflict, and through historical deepening of national identity instead of oppression.

Conclusion

The peaceful integration of Adjara into the Russian Empire following the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877–1878 was not merely the result of imperial military campaigns or international treaties. Rather, it was a complex, multilayered process shaped by internal dynamics, local leadership, and the strategic decisions of key historical actors. Among these, Sherif Khimshiashvili stands out as a central—yet underappreciated—figure whose contributions to the stabilisation and legitimisation of the transition were critical.

Far from being a passive recipient of imperial dictates, Sherif Khimshiashvili exercised agency at a decisive historical juncture. Moreover, he inherited a dynastic tradition of national aspiration and transformed it into a pragmatic political strategy. His choice to cooperate with Russian authorities was not rooted in opportunism but in a conscious effort to secure Adjara's cultural identity, prevent violent upheaval, and foster regional stability. Through this decision, he achieved what Selim Pasha Khimshiashvili could not: the return of Adjara to the Georgian political sphere, without bloodshed.

This integrative strategy required more than administrative compliance. It demanded symbolic authority, local legitimacy, and diplomatic intelligence.

Sherif Khimshiashvili's figure should be reassessed and integrated more fully in modern Georgian historiography and national memory. His leadership offers a historical model for nonviolent transformation, one based on dialogue rather than confrontation, and legitimacy rather than imposition. His example remains more relevant than ever in today's context, where questions of regional autonomy, national integration, and identity politics continue to be salient.

Sherif Khimshiashvili was not merely a feudal mediator but an architect of consensual nationhood. His legacy invites a rethinking of how national histories are written—and who is remembered as their authors. As such, he should be regarded not only as a local leader but as a national figure whose political maturity and historical insight helped shape the trajectory of modern Georgia.

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