



---

Lightning, Sacrifice, and Possession in the Traditional Religions of the Caucasus (Continued from *Anthropos* 99.2004: 143-159)

Author(s): Kevin Tuite

Source: *Anthropos*, Bd. 99, H. 2. (2004), pp. 481-497

Published by: [Anthropos Institute](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40466394>

Accessed: 18/08/2011 08:53

---

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



*Anthropos Institute* is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Anthropos*.

<http://www.jstor.org>



## Lightning, Sacrifice, and Possession in the Traditional Religions of the Caucasus

(Continued from *Anthropos* 99.2004: 143–159)

Kevin Tuite

**Abstract.** – In many communities of the West Caucasus, lightning-strike victims were regarded with particular awe, and a dance was performed around their bodies during which the name of one or another god is uttered, along with the mysterious vocable *čoppa*. Data concerning this ritual will be framed in an analysis of the representations of possession, sacrifice, and, in general, the appropriation of people or animals by divine beings in traditional Caucasian religious thought. Certain features of the religious thought of the Pshavs and Khevsurs of the northeast Georgian highlands will be compared and contrasted with those of the peoples of the West Caucasus. [*Caucasus, Pshav-Khevsureti, lightning-strike victims, sacrifice, possession*]

**Kevin Tuite**, Ph.D. (Chicago 1988) in Linguistics from the University of Chicago; since 1991 Prof. of Ethnolinguistics in the Department of Anthropology of the Université de Montréal. – Since 1985 linguistic and ethnographic fieldwork in the Republic of Georgia on numerous occasions. – Publications include: *Kartvelian Morphosyntax* (Munich 1998); *Ethnolinguistics and Anthropological Theory* (co-editor. Montréal: in press); *Current Trends in Caucasian, East European, and Inner Asian Linguistics* (co-editor. Amsterdam: in press) and various articles in *Journal of Indo-European Studies*, *Lingua*, *Anthropological Linguistics*, *Historiographia Linguistica* (see also References Cited).

### 3 Slavic Kupala and Georgian K'op'ala

#### 3.1 East Slavic Kupala and His Antecedents

The East Slavic summer festival of Ivan Kupala takes place on the eve of the feast day of St. John the Baptist (23–24 June, O. S.). Old Church Slavic *kōpati* and its descendents in the modern

Slavic languages (such as Russian *kupať*) mean “baptize,” also “bathe, dunk in water.” The use of this root to designate John the Baptist in Slavic seems straightforward, but the Kupala ceremony has relatively little to do with the biblical desert prophet. In rural Russia, Ukraine, and Belorussia, the festival is marked by the lighting of bonfires (called *kupalo* in some areas [Ivanov and Toporov 1974: 224]), which young people jump across, and the making of simple straw dolls, which are either burnt in the bonfire or thrown in the river (Rybakov 1987: 127–129, 153–155; 1994: 326 f.). The dolls as well are called *kupa(j)lo* (“solommenoe chuchelo, szhigae-moe v Ivanovskuju noch” [Preobrazhenskij 1959: 414; cp. Zelenin 1991: 396–399]); the purpose of tossing them in the river is either to ward off drought, or to predict whence a girl’s future husband will come (from the direction toward which the doll floats [Propp 1963: 83]). In a detailed and richly-documented study of the symbolism associated with the Ivan Kupala festival, Ivanov and Toporov (1974: 217–242; 1991c) demonstrate that the figure of Ivan Kupala, like other mythological personages across Central-Eastern Europe and Western Asia named after John the Baptist or the prophet Elijah, is the superficially Christianized avatar of the storm and lightning god known to many Indo-European-speaking peoples. Elijah’s alleged ability to cause drought and rain (1 Kings 17: 1–18: 46), call down lightning from heaven to consume his sacrifice (1 Kings 18: 38) and destroy

his adversaries (2 Kings 1: 9–14), and finally his assumption to heaven in a chariot of fire (2 Kings 2: 11 f.) made him perfectly suitable for superposition onto the role of a lightning and storm god. On the basis of tradition and a handful of indications in the Bible (Mark 8: 28, 9: 12 f.; John 1: 25; Luke 1: 17; Matthew 11: 13 f., 17: 10–12), John was widely regarded in popular Christianity as the prophet Elijah returned to earth (Averincev 1991).

Associated with the numerous past and contemporary manifestations of the Indo-European storm god are such motifs as the symbolic conjunction or opposition of fire and water; patronage of fertility, especially grain production; and a mythic cycle featuring the storm god and a serpent or monster, which the god defeats in order to release livestock or water for the benefit of human society. (This latter tale is considered by Ivanov and Toporov [1991b], and also by Lincoln [1981], as one of the foundational myths of early Indo-European social ideology.) The pre-Christian antecedent of Ivan Kupala among the Slavs was most likely the storm deity known as *Perunъ* in the Old Russian chronicles. By name, function, and symbolism Slavic *Perunъ* has been linked by scholars to an ancient cluster of significations and motifs attached to the Indo-European root *\*per-(kʷ)-u-* “strike.” Reflexes of this root appear in various Indo-European languages with meanings including “storm and lightning god” (Balto-Slavic), “oak tree” (Latin *quercus*; possibly Celtic [*h*]ercynia; note also the location of pagan Slavic sanctuaries to *Perunъ* in oak groves); “lightning” (Baltic *perkunas*; one possible etymology of Greek *keravnós*); “mountain, rock” (Hittite, Indic).<sup>24</sup> In traditional Baltic and Slavic religion, as reconstructed by Ivanov and Toporov (1991a, 1991f), Jakobson (1985a, 1985b), and Puhvel (1989: 222–238), *Perkunas-Perunъ* had many of the attributes of a chief god, either in his own right or as principal representative of an invisible and unreachable deus otiosus. As recently as 1734, the semipagan Balts celebrated the cult of their lightning god *Swats Parkauns* (“Saint *Perkunas*”) on the feast day of John the Baptist (Biezais 1975: 341). Elliptical Greek references to the belief, already archaic and discredited in classical times, that humans originated “from oak or from stone” (*apò druós . . . apò pétre:s* [Odyssey T 162]), attest to the association of *\*per-(kʷ)-u-* with fertility, as do the

old Lithuanian folk beliefs that lightning could beget children where it struck (Nagy 1990: 196–201; cp. Puhvel 1989: 226 f.). The Latvian deity *Perkons* was believed to assure abundant crops of grains, especially rye, barley, and hops (Biezais 1975: 342 f.). In other Indo-European traditions as well, storm gods were invoked for rain and/or good harvests (e. g., Scandinavian *Thor* as patron of cereals), and to insure fertility (*Indra* bringer of “prosperity, harvest, longevity, masculine force, wealth, livestock” [Toporov 1991]).

Returning to the Caucasus, we find parallels to components of the Indo-European storm god complex in Ossetic religion, where one would expect to find them, and in neighboring traditions. The Ossetic *Wacilla*, as Dumézil has demonstrated, continues numerous features shared by Indo-European war-and-storm deities such as *Indra* and *Thor*.<sup>25</sup> In addition to purely meteorological functions, *Wacilla* is celebrated in Ossetic folklore as a slayer of demons and protector of people and livestock against evil spirits. In particular, the Ossetes would invoke him each New Year’s Eve for protection against the *kurydzæutæ*, dangerous spirits who rule over the *kurys*, “une prairie

25 Certain features of *Wacilla*, as well as of the Nart hero *Batradz*, have been traced back by Dumézil to the unnamed Scythian deity glossed by Herodotus as “*Ares*” (Dumézil 1978: 19–90). A temple dedicated to him stood “in every district”; each temple consisted in a vast pile of wood (a scarce commodity in the steppes), “having a square platform on the top.” “An antique iron sword is planted on the top of every such mound: it serves as the image of *Ares*. Annual sacrifices of cattle and of horses are made to it, and in greater numbers than to all of the other gods.” Furthermore, one of every hundred prisoners of war was immolated at the temple of *Ares*, and their blood poured over the sword. These human sacrifices concluded with a macabre but intriguing gesture: “the right hands and arms of the slaughtered prisoners are cut off, and tossed up into the air. Then the other victims are slain, and those who have offered the sacrifice depart, leaving the arms where they fell, and the bodies also, separate” (Herodotus *History* IV, 59–62). Some of these details, in my view, may find distant parallels in the cult of Ossetic *Wacilla*. The platform set atop the mound of wood in *Ares*’ “temple” may be continued by the platform used in the choppa ceremonies; the pouring of blood over the sword might also be historically linked to the widespread Caucasian practice of stretching of the skin of the sacrificed goat on a wooden pole planted next to the platform. There are of course no direct modern correlates of the human sacrifices ascribed to the Scythians by Herodotus, but an echo may be discerned in the traditional West Caucasian interpretation of death from lightning-strike as tantamount to sacrifice at the god’s initiative. The throwing of the slain warrior’s arms in the air – as well as the leaving of their corpses on the spot of sacrifice – would accordingly signal a belief that these victims, having been appropriated (upward) by the deity, are off-limits to human society.

24 Gamkrelidze and Ivanov 1984: 792–794; Ivanov and Toporov 1991d, 1991e; Jakobson 1985a; Nagy 1990: 181–201; Watkins 1995: 343.



Map: The Caucasus.

mythique où poussent les semences de toutes les productions de la terre, et aussi le bonheur et le malheur” (Dumézil 1978: 69, 67–74). This luxurious, otherworldly prairie – cognate, according to Ivanov and Toporov, with the Greek Elysian Fields and Scandinavian Valhalla – appears to be descended from a topos in the archaic Indo-European storm-god cycle (1991b). The serpent, adversary of the storm god, is represented as possessing vast herds of livestock, which it keeps on a wide meadow in the underworld. The storm god does battle with the monster and finally slays it, freeing the animals. The opposition between the storm god (Wacilla) and the proprietors of the “Elysian Fields” is retained in the Ossetic materials, albeit in attenuated form. Another function of Wacilla which is probably inherited from his Indo-European forebear is that of assuring an abundant grain harvest. One of the chief festivals in honor of Wacilla is called *xory bon* “cereal day”; Ossetic women, for whom the name of this deity is taboo, refer to him by the paraphrase *xory xicau* “maître du blé” (Benveniste 1959: 140). The northwest-Caucasian-speaking Abazas likewise invoke their lightning god for a rich harvest of cereal crops (Pershits 1989: 224).

Deities with comparable attributes are featured in the traditional religious systems of other Caucasian communities, even though the choppa ritual

is not known to have been practiced there. One such case is Mingrelian *žini antar*, “Upper (celestial) Antar,” whose name was compared by Javakhishvili (1960/I: 122 f.) to that of Abkhaz Aytar (the shift /n/ > /l/ > /j/ is attested elsewhere in Mingrelian, cp. *majazoni* < *malazoni* < Geo. *monazoni* < “monk”). Antar has been equated by Abak’elia (1991: 6–26) with the personages invoked in various rituals under the names *žiniši orta*, “Orta (= “portion?”) from above,” simply *žiniši* “the one above,” or *žgege*, the Mingrelian St. George. Prayers and offerings (especially of roosters or goats) are made to Antar/Orta/George in times of lightning strike, excessive rain, or drought; to insure a good harvest; and for healing from certain illnesses, especially psychological ones.<sup>26</sup> St. George of Ilor, one of West Georgia’s holiest shrines, is also called upon to witness oaths and to curse oathbreakers. Lightning was believed to be the preferred weapon of St. George for pursuing unclean spirits, punishing those who

26 In his ethnographic study of Mingrelia, Mak’alataia (1941: 319) also mentions the offerings of split-tipped arrows to “the one above” to ward off lightning strike. He adds that epilepsy-like symptoms were interpreted as evidence that the victim had aroused the ire of *žiniši*, requiring the sacrifice of a candle of the same length as the victim, along with a silver thread, at St. George’s shrine at Ilor.

offended him, and for selecting individuals as “servants.” (These servants always wore white or colored clothing, even when in mourning. Abak’elia notes that “servants of the one above” [*žiniši maxvameri*] are called upon to pray for the protection of people and property from lightning.) The place where lightning struck is called *nažvarleni* in Mingrelian (lit. “spot where a cross [*žvari*] had been”), since lightning was believed to fall either in the form of a cross or that of a split-tipped arrow (*bordzal*), another weapon associated with St. George. Objects struck by lightning were not to be used, or even touched, for fear of provoking the deity’s anger (Abak’elia 1991: 6–26).

The Weinakh (Chechen and Ingush) supreme deity S(t)ela or Seli is represented as a particularly touchy and frequently hostile weather god. He is armed with the rainbow as a bow, and lightning bolts as arrows, and is imagined as the source of snow, hail, and other extreme weather phenomena. In the springtime month named for him (*Seli-but* “month/moon of Seli”) he is invoked in prayers for rain and a good harvest. At the same time, Weinakh legends describe how Seli punished various heroes and gods – including his son Elta, the divine patron of cereals and wild animals – for providing people with the means for existence: livestock, water, grain, and fire.<sup>27</sup> The 19th-century ethnographer B. Dalgat (1893) compared Seli to Ossetic Wacilla. Furthermore, “those killed by lightning were considered blessed. According to the Ingush, if people mourn for such a victim, the body will turn black in color. The place where a person or animal was killed by lightning is considered holy, and each year a sacrifice to Seli is performed there.”<sup>28</sup>

Although the Karachays and Balkars are speakers of a Turkic language, their lightning god Choppa (or Elliri Choppa) is marked by features likely to stem from an Indo-European source. He is described as a fertility deity, second in importance to the chief god Teyri; the Indo-European warrior and storm gods (Dumézil’s “second function”) are likewise subordinate to the sovereign *\*deiwoš-pater* “bright-sky-father,” and many are invoked for fertility. The choppa ritual performed on the occasion of the first thunder of the year

(“opening of the celestial vaults”) features jumping over bonfires, the burning of Choppa dolls, and other practices reminiscent of the East Slavic Ivan Kupala festival (Karaketov 1995). The same is true of the rainmaking rituals associated with Kabardian *cop’ay*. The Khantseguashe “shovel-lady” fetish brought by women to the riverbank, where they splash each other with water while the men pray for rain, is almost certainly connected – directly or indirectly – with the Slavic *kupa(j)lo* doll. Similar rainmaking rituals, involving a doll or fetish dunked in water, are known in Georgia and elsewhere in the Caucasus (Chikovani 1972: 252–258; Shamanov 1994).<sup>29</sup>

In view of the long history of contacts between the peoples of the Caucasus and those of the steppes to the north, contacts which go back at least to the Bronze Age and probably further into the past (Gadzhiev 1991; Gej 1996), and the evidence of Indo-European loanwords borrowed by Caucasian languages at various periods (Klimov 1991; Nichols 1997; Tuite and Schulze 1999), historical links between the Indo-European and Caucasian storm-god complexes should be no cause for surprise. At the same time, certain steppe Indo-European motifs appear to be absent, or nearly so, in the Caucasian ethnographic record, or present but in significantly transformed guise. The motif of enmity between the storm god and a serpent or monster guarding a valued resource (typically, livestock) does appear here and there in Caucasian folklore, but in general, the serpent plays a less uniformly negative role than in the Indo-European cultural area. It is a particularly striking fact that the very name of the Circassian lightning god, Shyble, means literally “horse-serpent” (Charachidzé 1981a), and as was mentioned above, the Kabardians imagine him in the form of a fiery serpent. The pouring of milk on the spot where lightning struck, a practice observed in Kabardia and Ossetia, may reflect the same association between serpents and milk that Chartolani (1961: 198) noted among the Svans, who believed that snakes liked “white” foods such

27 Tankiev 1991; Mal’sagov 1991; B. Dalgat 1893: 107–117; U. Dalgat 1972: 54 f., 258–260.

28 In the same passage, Dalgat (1893) relates the legend of a certain Auš, whose mausoleum was regarded as a holy site, even though it was believed that Seli had slain him with a thunderbolt for an unwitting violation of the mountaineers’ code of honor.

29 Sometimes the dolls are used for the opposite function: among the Khinalugh, a Daghestanian people of Azerbaijan, “during heavy rainfall young people made dolls of boards (*guzhul*), which they dressed in women’s clothing and carried throughout the village while singing . . . that ‘tomorrow the sun will shine’” (Volkova 1994; on a similar ritual among the Aghuls and Lezgins, see Ixilov 1967: 225). The practice of jumping across bonfires at the beginning of summer is likewise widespread in the Caucasus, especially among the Lezgin peoples of Daghestan (Kosven et al. 1960: 516; Ixilov 1967: 223).

as dairy products, and who interpret the sighting of a snake by the hearth as a sign of abundance.

Before going further, let us review the principal points covered so far: Analysis of the choppa rituals of the western Caucasus reveals a number of common features, attributed to the deity of lightning and storms. In particular, this god takes the initiative in choosing his own sacrificial victims, and striking them with his thunderbolt. Those who survive are possessed by the deity, and go into his service as prophets; those who die are buried on the spot, away from the village. In general, anyone or anything struck by lightning is regarded as “sacred” in the old sense of the word: appropriated by a deity, and at the same time taboo, off limits to humans. The choppa song and dance performed around the body of a lightning-strike victim is also used to provoke rain during a drought, and as a cure for certain types of mental illness. A description of Caucasian Albanian religious practices by the geographer Strabo indicates that the association between sacrifice, possession, and madness goes back at least two millennia in the Caucasus region.

### 3.2 K’op’ala, “Dieu Fulgurant?”

In the first book of his monumental “History of the Georgian People,” the historian Ivane Javakhishvili provided brief sketches of numerous figures from traditional Georgian religion and folklore. He devoted two pages to the Pkhovian (Pshav-Khevsur) *xvtisšvili* (“child of God”) K’op’ala. Most of the numerous legends and ballads featuring K’op’ala celebrate his prowess as an ogre-slayer, who rid the Georgian highlands of the fearsome man-eating giants who had until then oppressed the human population. Javakhishvili noted in passing that the name of K’op’ala resembles those of the Near Eastern goddess Cybele and the Russian Kupala, but as he saw little other basis for postulating a historical link among them, he did not pursue the matter in any depth (1960/I: 97 f.). Charachidzé (1968: 340 f.) cited Javakhishvili’s halfhearted proposal as though it had been intended seriously, then flatly rejected it as completely unfounded. With regard to Kupala, he could find little in the descriptions known to him (primarily supplied by Propp [1963]), to support a link to K’op’ala. “Quant à la ressemblance des noms,” he continues, “elle repose, du côté russe, sur un malentendu . . . Kupala signifie . . . tout simplement ‘baptiste,’ renvoyant au chrétien saint Jean-Baptiste et nullement à quelque divinité de l’ancien paganisme slave” (1968: 341). I will attempt in the following

pages to demonstrate that Javakhishvili’s tentative juxtaposition of K’op’ala and Kupala was not in fact as ill-advised as Charachidzé claimed, and that further examination of the dossiers of the two deities makes it look quite reasonable.<sup>30</sup>

One of these dossiers, that of K’op’ala, has in fact been assembled and analyzed with exemplary thoroughness by Charachidzé himself (1968: 337–433; 1981b). Although K’op’ala is rarely linked to lightning in any explicit way, it is significant that Charachidzé characterizes him as a “dieu fulgurant” (1981b: 455), an epithet motivated by the numerous features shared by K’op’ala and such Indo-European war-and-storm gods as Indra and the Ossetic Nart hero Batradz. K’op’ala is physically the strongest of the *xvtisšvili*, the deities created by the supreme god Ghmert, and in one ballad he is portrayed besting them in a weight-lifting contest. Like his Indo-European counterparts, K’op’ala, often in the company of his comrade and near-double Iaqsar, wages a campaign of extermination against the ogres and demons which once inhabited the Georgian highlands in great numbers, slaying them with his massive club. According to one legend, K’op’ala killed an ogre which had been damming the Aragvi River with gigantic boulders in an attempt to deprive the Pkhovians of water (A. Ochiauri 1991: 44; Vazha-Pshavela 1994); this motif has numerous parallels in the repertoire of the Indo-European storm god.<sup>31</sup> According to Charachidzé (1968: 428–431), among the core functions of K’op’ala in the religious system of the Pkhovian mountaineers are “circulation and mediation.” K’op’ala (and Iaqsar) circulate between the celestial, terrestrial, and underwater realms, and undergo transformation from human

30 Analysis of the ethnographic data concerning the Ivan Kupala complex led Ivanov and Toporov (1965: 146 f.; 1991c) to propose that the name Kup-al-a derives from an Indo-European root *\*kwep/kup* which they gloss “kipet’, vskipat’, strastno zhelat’” (seethe, boil, passionately desire), rather than Old Church Slavic *kōpati*, a possible borrowing from Latin *compater* or some other source (Preobrazhenskij 1959: 412–414; Vasmer 1953: 695). Recently, however, Rix et al. (1998: 334) revised the reconstructed form of the Indo-European root claimed to be antecedent to Kupala (*\*kweH<sub>1</sub>p-* “sieden”), and in so doing separated it from both *\*kwep-* “hauchen” and *\*kewp-* “(innerlich) beben”; Pokorny had grouped reflexes of these three roots under the single lemma *\*kwe:p-/\*kewəp-/\*kwəp-/\*ku(:)p-* “rauchen, wallen, kochen; auch seelisch in Aufruhr, in heftiger Bewegung sein” (1959: 596 f.).

31 Ivanov and Toporov consider the theme of a storm god liberating a water source blocked by monsters to be a variant of the storm-god-defeats-serpent myth (1974: 138–141).

to animal and, finally, to divine form. One especially significant component of K'op'ala's circulating and mediating activity is the liberation of "trapped" souls (*sulis gamoqsna*). Should a person die of drowning or hanging, or be killed by an avalanche, the oracle of K'arat'is-Jvari, the Khevsur shrine dedicated to K'op'ala, is summoned to the scene. (This shrine is also known under the name "Soul-saver" [*sultamqsneli*].) The Pkhovians believed that a soul trapped under a surface of water or snow, or stuck within a cadaver with the throat constricted by a noose, could not escape and risked capture by demons. Bearing the banner of the shrine, the oracle would call upon the patron deity of K'arat'is-Jvari to liberate the victim's soul and slay the demons that threatened it. A goat was slaughtered with a back-handed stroke of the knife, as is considered appropriate by the Pkhovians for an appeasement sacrifice to demons, and its meat left uneaten on the spot, as an offering in exchange for the soul (S. Mak'alatia 1935: 216). Consistent with his function as a liberator of souls, K'op'ala was also invoked to treat certain physical and mental illnesses attributed to possession by demons, especially cases of insanity (Charachidzé 1968: 405–422; Mindadze 2000: 202–206).

If indeed certain elements of K'op'ala's character match those of Indra, Batradz, and other Indo-European "second-function" deities, others do not. The chief enemies of K'op'ala and Iaqsar are ogres (many-headed man-eating giants) rather than a wealth-guarding serpent. At the same time, a mythical serpent (*gvelisperi*) does appear in the K'op'ala cycle, but in a supporting, rather than adversarial, role. This serpent is said to patrol the borders of the fields of hops used to make ritual beer for use at K'op'ala's sanctuary of K'arat'is-Jvari (Charachidzé 1968: 421 f.).<sup>32</sup> In view of what was mentioned above concerning the Circassian lightning god Shyble, one wonders if the serpent *gvelisperi* was once considered a transformation of K'op'ala himself. The absence of lightning in K'op'ala's résumé also represents a significant contrast with its ubiquity in the portrayals of Indo-European deities such as Indra. One curious fact might help explain this seeming anomaly. According to a Khevsur informant interviewed by Georgian ethnographers in the earlier part of the past century, lightning was believed to have been created by God to massacre demons. Hence any

human killed by lightning was thought to have been killed in error by a thunderbolt aimed at a demon which went astray. As compensation, God would take the unintended victim to his realm; therefore "whoever dies from a lightning strike is happy in the Land of Souls" (Baliauri and Mak'alatia 1940: 53).<sup>33</sup>

Let us take the step – which the reader has doubtless anticipated for some time now – of juxtaposing the east-central Caucasian K'op'ala and the lightning gods of the western Caucasus. In addition to some shared traits, such as the power to cure mental illness, others appear to be in a relation of inversion. As was demonstrated earlier, the west Caucasian storm gods seize their victims by lightning strike, and appropriate them *upward* into their celestial realm. A goat is sacrificed to appease the anger of a beneficial, but dangerous, sky god. In the case of K'op'ala, by contrast, his function is to liberate souls which have been captured *downward* by demons. A black goat is the sacrifice of choice, but in Pkhovi it is intended to appease the demons, not the deity. Wacilla, Shyble, and the other lightning gods strike without warning, and seize their "offerings" without awaiting the permission of the community. K'op'ala, represented by his oracle, comes when called upon by people to rescue trapped souls. Lightning, the instrument by which the Indo-European and west Caucasian storm gods appropriate their victims, was imagined by some Pkhovians as a weapon specifically directed against demons, not people. As in the west, those killed by lightning-strike are believed to end up in a special place in the afterlife, but for very different reasons: the Ossetes regard them as victims called by Wacilla to his side, whereas the Pkhovians regard their good fortune in *suleti*, the Land of Souls, as compensation for their accidental death. The contrast between the sets of representations is striking. In the Pkhovian imagination, K'op'ala is

32 Such fields are considered the property of the shrine and its patron deity in Pkhovi, and the grain that is harvested from them is stored in special granaries, which only a delegated shrine official can enter.

33 This does not appear any longer to be the most widely-shared view of the matter, if it ever was. According to the Pshav and Khevsur natives interviewed by me, lightning death is treated like drowning or suicide. The chief priest goes to the site of the tragedy and sacrifices a goat in order to appease the "evil angel" (*avi angelozi*) believed to pursue the souls of those who die an unnatural death. Either K'op'ala or Iaqsar may be invoked on this occasion. The meat of the sacrificed goat was tossed backwards over the priest's shoulder and left on the spot for the demons. The victim's body, if recovered, was then returned to the village for burial in the cemetery (interviews with Thek'le Badrishvili-Gosharashvili, July 1997; Pilip'e Baghauri, 25 June 2000; Tinatin Ochauri, 30 June 2000; cp. A. Ochauri 1991).

not so much a lightning god as a representation of combative force harnessed for the service of the community. In this respect he resembles St. George rather more than Elijah.

### 3.3 K'op'ala, Iaqsar, P'irkush, and St. George

Of the various patron deities commemorated in invocations, ballads, and hymns, several are described as *naxorcivlarni*, “former mortals” who were granted divine status by God in exchange for service in the battle against ogres. Chief among these are K'op'ala, Iaqsar, and the mythical goldsmith and weapons-maker P'irkush (A. Ochauri 1991: 41–45, 95, 155). The features and activities attributed to Iaqsar are so similar to those of K'op'ala that Charachidzé (1981b: 455) characterized Iaqsar as K'op'ala's “hypostase.”<sup>34</sup> Many Pkhovian texts designate him as K'op'ala's sworn brother (*modzme*) or even as his genuine brother (A. Ochauri 1991: 128). Both are celebrated for their superhuman strength, granted to them by God to enable them to free the land of ogres. Both undergo underwater shape-changes. In one cycle of ballads, K'op'ala is depicted diving into a river and resurfacing in the form of a deer. In another, Iaqsar pursues a one-eyed ogre who plunges into a lake (usually said to be Abudelaoris T'ba, outside of the Khevsur village Roshk'a); Iaqsar dives in after the ogre and kills him, but the ogre's impure blood blocks the surface of the lake, trapping Iaqsar underwater. He is freed only after people clear the water with the blood of a four-horned, four-eared ram. When Iaqsar reappears at the surface, he has been transformed into a shining, winged deity. The artisan P'irkush produced weapons used to slay the ogres. He was himself captured by the ogres, but later set free by Iaqsar. The association of P'irkush and the heroes Iaqsar and K'op'ala was compared by Ivanov and Toporov (1974: 148–163) to the motif of a Hephaestus-type blacksmith who provides arms with thunderbolt-like characteristics to a war-and-storm god, attested in the Greek, Scandinavian, and Indic traditions, but also outside of the Indo-European world. The theme of a “Dieu

de l'ouragan [qui] reçoit ses armes – l'éclair et la foudre – de la part d'un Forgeron divin” occurs in ancient Egyptian and Near Eastern mythologies (Eliade 1977: 84 f.). Abkhazian tradition as well associates the lightning god Afə with the divine blacksmith Shashwə (and metalworking in general, as in the proverb cited by Ardzinba [1988: 277]: “the forge is a fragment of Afə”).

Although there is evidence supporting Ivanov and Toporov's postulated historical link of K'op'ala, Iaqsar, and P'irkush to the Indo-European war-and-storm-god complex, in the context of Pkhovian tradition these and other divinized heroes are associated most closely with Giorgi, the Pkhovian St. George. The various Transcaucasian St. Georges have as their principal function the patronage and protection of men fulfilling their roles as exploiters, for the profit of their communities, of the undomesticated space outside of the village and its adjacent fields. St. George is the protector of shepherds, hunters, travellers, and men raiding cattle from their neighbors on the other side of the mountains (Charachidzé 1968: 620; Tuite 1998). The image of K'op'ala, massacrer of ogres and idealization of masculine prowess, thus considerably overlaps that of St. George. One informant interviewed by the folklorist M. Chikovani went so far as to equate K'op'ala and Giorgi: *k'op'ala igive c'minda giorgia* “K'op'ala is the same as St. George” (Chikovani 1972: 338), an identification earlier noted by Javakhishvili (1960/I: 97 f.). Charachidzé noted a Pkhovian invocation addressed to “the force of Saint George of K'op'ala” (*dzalo c'minda giorgi k'op'alesao*), which was called upon to defend those who “go in the spaces far from home, who go far, who go to hunt” (Charachidzé 1968: 406, 445). At the powerful Khevsur shrine of St. George at Gudani, the *xvtisšvilni* K'op'ala and Saneba – likewise a “patron des prédateurs (pillards et chasseurs)” – are invoked as temporary replacements (*moadgile*) of Giorgi, should the latter be for some reason unreachable (Charachidzé 1968: 470).

The identification of K'op'ala and St. George in Pkhovi can be compared to the representations of the various Elijahs and St. Georges in the western Caucasian belief systems. In Rach'a and Ossetia, Elijah and St. George form a pair, with related but contrastive functions. As mentioned earlier, the Georgians of highland Rach'a prayed to Ilia for rain in times of drought, and to Giorgi to protect their crops from hail. If the powerful but often destructive Ilia – represented in many parts of Georgia as a blind deity scattering rain and hail upon good and bad alike – is the

34 The phonological shape of the name “Iaqsar” does not look Georgian. The most promising source, as Abaev has demonstrated (1958–1989/IV: 224 f.) is pre-Ossetic (*æ*)*xsar* “martial valor, force, power” (< Ir. \**xšaθra* < In-Ir. \**kšatra*-) (cp. Dumézil 1995/I: 488). The proposed derivation from the root which was, among other things, the Indo-Iranian designation of Dumézil's “2nd function” fits extremely well with the reconstruction proposed here for Iaqsar's double K'op'ala.



image of uncontrolled natural force, Giorgi represented controlled, specifically masculine force, deployed for the profit and defense of human society. Vielle (1997: 190 f.) characterizes Ossetic Wacilla and Wastyrdji in comparable terms: the former as “la foudre impitoyable,” whereas the latter represents “la virilité exacerbée.” At the linguistic level, these two are the only significant Ossetic deities whose names are prefixed by *wac-/was-* “saint” (Wastyrdji < \**was-gergi*), and the names of both are taboo to women.<sup>35</sup> Wacilla, doubled by the spirit Tyxost (whom Dumézil considers the more direct continuation of the ancient Indo-European lightning god in Ossetic religion (1978: 67–74)), is by no means blind, and his functions, like those of other Indo-European second-function divinities, include fertility, rain-making, and protection against enemies. This last feature, as Dumézil notes, overlaps the war- and defense-related role of Wastyrdji. Partial overlap of the representations of Elijah and St. George is in fact fairly widespread in East European folk Christianity. The South Slavic *Zeleni Juraj* “Green George,” for example, whose festival is celebrated on 23–24 April, was invoked for springtime fertility and protection of livestock from predators (especially wolves) (Ivanov and Toporov 1974: 180–216; Koleva 1974). At a chronologically deeper level, there is evidence from several traditions for the exchange of features between what some specialists in Indo-European comparative religion have reconstructed as a Varuna-type sovereign deity (associated with magic, prophecy, and the punishment of oathbreakers with disease; the deity underlying Elijah), and an Indra-type monster-slaying war god, overlain by St. George. The Greek supreme deity Zeus is a notable example, having incorporated many of the attributes reconstructed for the second-function war god, including the use of thunderbolts (Sergent 1997: 302–305; Puhvel 1989: 130 f.). The Baltic and Slavic “divine striker” \**Per(k)un-* might represent the opposite phenomenon, that is, a storm-and-war god taking over the attributes of a first-function Varuna-type celestial sovereign (Jakobson 1985a). In the case of Pkhovian K’op’ala, however, overlap with the representation of Giorgi has gone to the point of assimilation, at the cost of those features of the west Caucasian and Indo-European storm gods related to sacrifice, possession, and the unpredictable use of force.

<sup>35</sup> Women referred to Wacilla as *xory xicau* “lord of grains” and Wastyrdji as *laęty dzwar* “patron-saint of men” (Dumézil 1978: 238; Benveniste 1959: 133, 140).

The transformation of a deity comparable to Ossetic Wacilla/Alardy and Slavic Perunь/Kupala into Pkhovian K’op’ala is highly significant. On the one hand, we have a dangerous, unpredictable storm god who uses his thunderbolts to select his own sacrificial victims – without waiting for the human community to choose one for him –, and whose anger needs to be appeased by additional sacrifice. Those victims offered to him, or slain by his thunderbolt, are dangerously sacred, and cannot be brought back to the village. On the other hand he is a powerful deity who slays demons and ogres for the benefit of humankind. Although it is not specified who throws it, the lightning bolt as well is intended to exterminate demons, and, therefore, in general a useful thing. K’op’ala has the special mission to free souls captured by demons, and bring them back to their community, whence they can follow the normal trajectory to the Land of Souls. Compared to his Abkhaz, Ossetic, and Kabardian counterparts, therefore, K’op’ala appears as a thoroughly domesticated deity, a reliable defender of the human community. Rather than to capture souls, he is always on call to free them from demons. Indeed, it is evident that the negative aspects of the west Caucasian storm gods have been projected onto the Pkhovian demons, and only the positive features have been inherited by K’op’ala. The derivation of K’op’ala from Kupala might seem to some to be a highly speculative hypothesis, despite the phonetic similarity between the names, and the various semantic resemblances shared by K’op’ala and the divine personages discussed elsewhere in this article. What renders it more probable is its consistence with what appears to have been a thoroughgoing restructuring – one could even call it a *reform* – of the inherited religious system in Pkhovi some centuries ago. This restructuring gave rise to new conceptions of the priesthood, of the relation between human society and the supernatural realms, and of sacrifice and possession.

#### 4 The Pkhovian Reform

The provinces of Pshavi and Khevsureti would, on the face of it, seem unlikely candidates to be the last refuge of Caucasian paganism, a religious system still relatively intact up until World War II and the mass resettlement of the Khevsurs in the 1950s. Pkhovi, as these two provinces were called in the medieval Georgian chronicles (and as I will refer to them here), is situated only 100 km north of the Georgian capital Tbilisi, and the local pop-

ulation speaks a variety of Georgian not very different from the standard language of six or seven centuries ago. There is certainly nothing remotely comparable to the extreme linguistic diversity of Daghestan, or even that of western Georgia, where the Kartvelian languages Mingrelian and Svan, and the unrelated northwest Caucasian language Abkhaz, are spoken by sizeable speech communities. The paradox does not stop there. Svaneti was no less inaccessible from the lowland west Georgian (Imeretian) capital of Kutaisi than Pkhovi is from Tbilisi, yet the Svan elite participated actively in the early medieval political formations of Lazica (4th–5th c. AD) and Abkhazia (8th–10th c.), and subsequently in the Georgian kingdom united by Bagrat III and Davit IV (11th–13th c.). The more remote district of Upper Svaneti alone, along the upper valley of the Ingur River, has over one hundred Georgian Orthodox churches, almost all of them constructed in the period from the 9th to the 13th century, the golden age of Georgian feudalism (Taq'aishvili 1991).<sup>36</sup> I have argued elsewhere that the traditional religious practices of the Svans, as attested in the late 19th and 20th centuries, show the imprint of centuries of feudalism, which persisted as a political and economic order until its abolition by the Tsarist government in the mid-19th century (Tuite 2001). Pkhovi, by contrast, is rarely mentioned by medieval chroniclers, and when it is, it is usually characterized as a nest of unruly pagans, which can only be pacified by the sword. Christian churches are conspicuously absent, as is any evidence of the implantation of lowland-style feudalism. The social and political system was essentially classless and egalitarian – with one important exception – up to the present day. Yet a closer examination of the chants, ballads, and ethnographic descriptions of Pkhovian culture reveals a surprising fact: Christianity and feudalism have in fact left a profound imprint on the traditional religious system, but only at the *cosmological* level.

The nature of the restructuring undergone by the inherited religious system in Pkhovi can be best understood through a comparison with the traditional religion of the Svans. As Charachidzé (1968: 109) noted, non-Christian practices and beliefs observed in both Svaneti and Pkhovi are

likely to be very ancient, going back to the time of the separation of the Svan language from the ancestral Proto-Kartvelian language in the Bronze Age. The investigations of Bardavelidze (1957), Charachidzé (1968), Virsaladze (1976) and this writer (Tuite 2000, 2001), among others, have uncovered a number of common features which would appear to have been characteristic of the Georgian belief system of four or five millennia ago:

(1) The contrast, or opposition, of male-linked/divine “purity” and female-linked/corporeal “impurity,” the latter derived from an ancient representation of women as inherently powerful, but threatening to male/divine “purity.” People, places, and objects can be rendered more “pure” by the blood of sacrificed animals, which contrasted with the dangerous, “polluting” blood of women shed during menstruation and childbirth. Associated with this notion of opposed principles of “purity” and “impurity” is the seeming paradox that the survival of the community requires contact and cooperation between them.

(2) A gradient hierarchy of beings according to their degree of participation in the divine principle, a factor which is susceptible to increase or decrease.

(3) Practices which foster network-building and relations of interdependence between neighboring social groups, such as exogamically-oriented marital preferences, fictive kinship (sworn siblinghood, adoption, fosterage) crossing class and ethnic lines, and perhaps something akin to the “believer-unbeliever” shrines at the Pkhovi-Weinakh frontier, at which both Georgians and Chechens worshipped (Goniashvili 1971; Ochiauri 1967: 68–70; Volkova 1989: 200–203).

(4) Paired female and male divine beings, of which the female circulates between the hearth (the interior of domestic space, the interior of the interior) and the remote, uninhabited, unreachable outside (exterior of the exterior). Her male counterpart, usually named after St. George (Geo. *Givargi*, Svan *žgeræg*), circulates between the public spaces of the community (the exterior of the interior) and those outside spaces exploited for the profit of the community (the interior of the exterior). For this reason, the various St. Georges are invoked as patrons of hunters, woodsmen, travellers, warriors, even livestock-thieves.

The ancestral religion has evolved along very different paths in Svaneti and in Pkhovi. In a recent study of the impact of medieval lowland Georgian sociopolitical hierarchicalization (“feudalism”) on the religious systems of the eastern and western

36 Frequent contacts between lowland centers and even the most remote valleys of Upper Svaneti go back at least to the Bronze Age, when Svaneti was an important source of high-grade metals (especially arsenic-rich copper and gold), giving rise to local, Svanetian schools of metalworking and other arts.

Georgian highlands, I noted a sharp distinction between the changes undergone by Svanetian traditional religion – in reaction to the implantation of feudal institutions, Orthodox churches and a local aristocracy from at least the 9th century –, and those which occurred in Pkhovi, which “n’a jamais été intégrée au système féodale” (Charachidzé 1971: 45), despite the sporadic incursions of royal troops bent on bringing them to submission. The notions of Orthodox Christianity and feudal socioeconomic organization reached Pkhovi via transmission from neighboring tribes, some of which had become nominal fiefs of the Georgian crown, although with minimal impact on their traditional systems of land tenure and self-governance. Lowland concepts also percolated into the mountains through the mediation of satellite communities in the eastern Georgian provinces of Tianeti and K’akheti, formed over the centuries by Pkhovians in search of farmland, vineyards, and pastures (Topchishvili 1981, 1984). Until the mass displacements of the Soviet period, Pkhovians living at lower altitudes maintained regular contact with the highland communities, especially on the occasions of major festivals. The religious and cultural centers remained in Pkhovi, although the major highland shrines were linked to subordinate sanctuaries in the peripheral areas, the resident *xvtisšvilni* of which were typically designated as their “younger brothers.” As a regime of land ownership based on the hierarchical and personal relation between vassals and lords, feudalism (Geo. *p’at’ronq’moba*, lit. “lord-vassality”) provided the Pkhovians with new concepts and terminology for imagining the mutual dependency between humans and deities, and the relationship of both to the land. To summarize very briefly, the hierarchy of human and supernatural beings came to be conceived in feudal terms, with the supreme deity (*ymerti*) enthroned at a heavenly court (*yvtis k’ari*), where the *xvtisšvilni* (“children of God”) periodically assemble. These latter are divided into those created divine by God (*cit čamosulni*, “descended from heaven” to found a sanctuary), and the *naxorcivlarni*, “former mortals,” legendary heroes who had been elevated to divine status by him (A. Ochauri 1991: 14). Like a feudal monarch, God divided the land among the *xvtisšvilni* and set them in authority over the people dwelling on their territory (A. Ochauri 1991: 49, 53–55, 95, 129). The *xvtisšvilni* are addressed as *bat’onni* “lords,” the members of the community refer to themselves as *q’mani* “vassals,” a terminology identical to that of medieval Georgian feudalism in the lowlands. The patron *xvtisšvili*

of each highland clan or commune is believed to reside in a shrine, a complex of simple stone buildings outside of the village. The shrine, its surrounding territory, and a sizeable portion of the community’s farmland, pastures and forests are said to belong to the invisible “lord,” being designated *xat’is mamuli* “shrine’s [hereditary] land” or *xodabuni* (another borrowing from the lexicon of lowland feudalism, meaning “lord’s land”). The shrine lands were worked by the “vassals” collectively, with a sizeable portion of the harvest retained by the shrine. The grain, considered sacred, was stored by a shrine official in a special granary, and used to brew beer and bake bread for communal feast days. Should a “vassal” die without leaving heirs, or emigrate from the community, the family lands reverted to the shrine. The texts from Pshavi collected by A. Ochauri (1991: 39 f., 271 f.) include accounts of a human overlord from the lowlands transferring possession of an escaped serf to a divine overlord in the mountains, and of two adjacent *xvtisšvilni* depicted quarreling over possession of land and the peasants living on it.

The “feudalization” of Pkhovian cosmology appears to have occurred in the context of a generalized restructuring of the indigenous religious system, and a monopolization of important social and religious functions by specialist priests (*qevisberi* or *xucesi*, “elder”) and oracles (*kadagi*, sometimes the same person as the chief priest), recruited from specific lineages in each community. In Svaneti, for example, many feast days are celebrated within the home or among a group of neighboring households (called *lask’ær*), and are presided over by the elder man or woman of the host family. Prayers and the presentation of offerings in public ritual spaces (mostly Orthodox churches, which came into the possession of local lineage groups after the abolition of feudalism) are the responsibility of household heads or semi-professional “priests” (*bap’ær*) who were trained by apprenticeship to a more experienced priest, and who serve at the pleasure of the village council (Xaradze and Robakidze 1964: 86).<sup>37</sup> In Pkhovi, by contrast, the household is far less often used as a ceremonial site, except during the late-winter and spring season – corresponding to Orthodox Lent – when the family members (usually the womenfolk) perform a series of domestic rituals intended to appease or ward off potential sources of harm. At other times of

37 As one Svan proverb puts it “the folk-doctor, the priest, and the blacksmith are for everyone” (*akimi p’ap’i muškit čimiš li*), that is, they are considered specialized practitioners in the service of the community (Nizharadze 1962: 173).

the year almost all ceremonies are performed at one or another of the community's public shrines, under the direction of the clan's chief priest (*tav-qevisberi*). All animal sacrifices were performed by the priest or his designated assistants.<sup>38</sup> The two principal types of sacrifice were the *purificatory* offering of a bull or sheep, intended to make the sacrificer(s) more acceptable to the purity-obsessed *xvtisšvilni*, and the *propitiatory* offering of a goat either to deities of subordinate rank and ambiguous nature (the potentially malicious *dobilni*, "sworn sisters" of the *xvtisšvilni*), or to "ogres" (*devebi*) and "demons" (*ešmak'ebi*). Note that in Pkhovi, as informants have repeatedly affirmed, goats are never sacrificed to the male *xvtisšvilni*. This represents an important contrast to the Abkhazian and Ossetian practice, mentioned earlier, of offering goats to their most powerful male-gendered gods.

The exceptions, where goats are known to have been sacrificed to male *xvtisšvilni* in Pkhovi, merit a brief detour. In much of Georgia, especially in the lowlands, St. Barbara is invoked in prayers for children sick with the infectious diseases – especially smallpox – euphemistically known to the Georgians as the *bat'onebi*, lit. "lords," since these illnesses are believed to be sent by God himself (Bleichsteiner 1954; Bardavelidze 1941b). As in the traditional medical practices of many European countries, St. Barbara is imagined as a patron of healing, and in particular who intercedes for victims of smallpox and lightning strike.<sup>39</sup> In Pkhovi, however, prayers in times of a smallpox outbreak are directed not to St. Barbara, but rather to the powerful male-gendered deity K'viria, divine mediator between the remote supreme God and human society ("K'viria, whose tent is pitched in God's court, relieve us from this illness spawned by God [*es xtisagan gamašobili saržielni*]"). The intervention of K'viria, rather than K'op'ala or Iaqsar, is consistent with the belief that smallpox is brought by angels sent by God himself, rather than by "demons" easily subdued by K'op'ala's imposing physical force (Mindadze 1979; 2000: 246–

252). Should the disease continue to spread unabated, a special ceremony is performed, called *saxmto-sak'viriao* "for God, for K'viria." Beer is brewed, and meat- and cheese-filled breads ("plague offerings," *žam-sac'ir*) are baked. A ram is sacrificed to God, whereas a goat (or kid) is offered to K'viria (Mindadze 1979). The choice of sacrifice to K'viria reflects his subordinate status relative to God, and echoes the west Caucasian practices described earlier in this article. Goat sacrifice is also practiced at a handful of Pshav and Khevsur shrines specifically dedicated to Elia, where the community prays for the protection of their crops from hail and adverse weather. At the small Khevsur shrine to Elia near Xaxabos Jvari, a goat-kid is sacrificed on the second day of the principal summer festival of Atengena (late July). The meat is cut from the bones without breaking them, then cooked. After the goat meat has been eaten, the bones are collected and set inside the goatskin, which is hung from a long pole on a mountaintop. The intention is to remind the subordinate spirits who bring hail that "a goat-kid has been killed for Elia, and therefore Elia does not give them permission to destroy the crops, for he is the chief patron of the sky and clouds (*ca-yrubelt uproši mmartveli*)" (Ruxadze 1999: 97–107).

The "sworn sisters," and sometimes other types of subordinate spirits, are represented at each Pkhovian shrine complex, with characterizations and functions contrasting distinctly from those of the resident *xvtisšvili*. At some distance from the latter's sanctuary, which is considered particularly "pure" ground, off limits to women, are one or more shrines where offerings are presented to such female spirits as the "Place Mother" (*adgilis deda*), the "Mother of God" (*γvtismšobeli*), or the "sworn sister(s)" (*dobili*) of the *xvtisšvili*. Men, and especially women, petition these deities for the health and fertility of people and livestock, and for a safe childbirth. Although a source of benefit to the community, the "sworn sisters" of the *xvtisšvili* are imagined to be capable of visiting disease (especially childhood illnesses) upon people, as well as preventing it, and, more importantly, as having a "demonic" side to their character, which can surface at any time. At some villages in northern Khevsureti are the ruined shrines of deities which "turn into demons (*ešmak'ad gadaikceva*) when people stop praying to them. If earlier they could help people, now they are only capable of causing harm" (Ochiauri 1988: 194 f.). These so-called "diabolized" (*gamis'rivlebuli*) spirits are the residents of shrines abandoned by the community who, angered by neglect and the lack of offerings, turn

38 Indeed, the ethnographic materials from a century ago imply that the only meat eaten by Pkhovians came either from domestic animals ceremonially slaughtered by a shrine official, or game animals killed by a hunter (whose activities during the hunt in many respects parallel those of a priest performing a sacrifice).

39 One medieval Georgian hagiography, cited by Mindadze (2000: 254), characterizes St. Barbara as "a special helper of those sick from smallpox (*sak'utar meoxed q'avivilisa sneulebisatvis*)," in accordance with her being a helper of those afflicted by "fire, plague, and lightning (*cecxlisa žamisa da mexisagan*), and in general as a protector from unexpected death."

into harmful beings of female gender believed to inflict illness upon children who hazard too close to their ruined sanctuaries. The same ambiguous, potentially demonic, nature characterizes other supernatural auxiliaries of the Pkhovian *xvtisšvilni*. Some of these are believed to be accompanied by invisible hunting dogs (*mc'evarni*) or an army of wolf-like “enforcers” (*iasauli*), which they would unleash upon “vassals” who somehow provoked their anger.<sup>40</sup> The guard snake (*gvelisperi*) which patrols K'op'ala's sacred hops field appears to be a creature of the same sort. After massacring the ogres, K'op'ala was said to have kept one alive, chained up under a cliff at the end of a valley near Ak'usho. He would use this ogre as an enforcer, releasing him to punish those who incurred his wrath (A. Ochiauri 1991: 99).

What these auxiliary spirits have in common is a close association with a male *xvtisšvili*, in whose shrine complex they reside, and a dangerous nature which is ordinarily exploited by their superior as an instrument of punishment. The two sides, beneficial and harmful, of the lightning god of the western Caucasian peoples are distributed between two contrastive and complementary sets of supernatural beings in the Pkhovian religious system: the positive-valued, exclusively male *xvtisšvili*, and their ambiguously-valued female, animal, or monstrous auxiliaries. As a preliminary working hypothesis, which I intend to examine in further fieldwork in highland Georgia, I propose that the segmentation of positive and ambiguous divine traits, and their projection onto two sets of spirits, was an innovation of the Pkhovian reform, consistent with the rigorous “binarization” of religious and social ideology which gave rise to the system described by 19th- and early 20th-century Georgian ethnographers. This hypothesis offers a new perspective on the soul-liberation function attributed to K'op'ala. The cluster of traits comprising the representations of Wacilla and the other lightning gods of the western Caucasus – random selection and appropriation of a victim, whose soul will have a privileged relation to the deity, and appeasement with a goat sacrifice – are divided between the Pkhovian demons, who play a fundamentally negative role, and the divinized hero K'op'ala, whose intervention is purely positive.

While the Pkhovian priests preside at public rituals, the oracles are the power behind the throne. The oracles, who were almost always men, communicated the *xvtisšvili*'s instructions to the community. He – or rather the deity speaking through him – selected the shrine officials, chose the site for new shrine buildings, diagnosed the cause of illnesses, and predicted the future (Ochiauri 1954; Charachidzé 1968: 169–186). Like the priest, he was subjected to heavy obligations to maintain ritual purity; also like the priest, he was selected directly by the *xvtisšvili*, although he was usually patrilineally descended from previous oracles (1968: 122 f.). The ethnographic accounts of a century or so ago, as well as those collected by me in recent years, reflect an opposition – indeed, a *tension* – in Pkhovian representations of the role of the (almost always male) oracle and the roles of other types of possessed individuals, most of whom were female. Although oracles went into trances, and some manifested the frenzied movements and disordered speech (*ḡabuši*) typical of possession, they acquired a degree of control over their communicative function, and could go into spokesman mode – with or without signs of psychic agitation – when it was called for (1968: 153 f., 199–201). Female possession was usually diagnosed as punishment for some real or imagined sin against the deity, and tended to be sporadic and involuntary. In the highlands, women seers did exist, but their role was limited to contact with the souls of the dead (*mesultane*) or the diagnosis of certain types of ailment (*mk'itxavi*). In the lowland communities of eastern Georgia, mostly former satellite villages of Pkhovian origin, female oracles are fairly numerous, but they are viewed with disdain and mistrust by highland shrine officials. As in the highlands, these women regard their possession as punishment for sin rather than as a sign of divine election (Bardavelidze 1941a; Charachidzé 1968: 187–201; author's fieldnotes).

Consistent with the increasing dominance of the priest and oracle in the religious life of the Pkhovian community was an increased specialization of religious knowledge, in the form of elaborate prayers and invocations (lengthy and complicated texts containing lists of deities, often imbedded in more-or-less garbled fragments from the Orthodox liturgy or the Gospels), and precise norms concerning the performance of purifications and sacrifices, the preparation of ritual breads, the handling of grain from the shrine's fields, and so forth. This was expressed at the level of social and religious ideology in the form of the thoroughgoing, crystalline binarism – unequalled elsewhere

40 Bardavelidze 1957: 22; Charachidzé 1968: 298 f.; Mindadze 2000: 146. The term *iasauli*, which referred to a type of agent sent to enforce royal decrees in medieval Georgia, is ultimately from Mongol *jasa'ul*, an assistant or adjutant officer (P. Golden, pers. comm.).

in the Caucasus – that has fascinated ethnographers for over a century. The shrine officials, especially those with a lifetime vocation, were required to attain and maintain a level of “purity” – avoidance of the proximity of women at certain times of the year, abstention from certain foods, regular and costly purificatory sacrifices – that was beyond the reach of rank-and-file community members. The increasing systematization, regulation and specialization of the Pkhovian religious order, I hypothesize, made the role of a lightning god with the properties of Slavic Perunъ/Kupala, Abkhazian Afə or Ossetic Wacilla particularly problematic. Such a deity represented, in effect, those aspects of sacrifice and possession which the Pkhovian hierarchy sought to bring under its control. The Indo-European and western Caucasian storm gods struck whenever, wherever, and whomever they chose, seizing victims without waiting for the community to take the initiative of making a sacrifice. They also took the initiative in selecting their prophets, i. e., those lightning-strike victims who survived, and perhaps (as the Abkhazian data implies) individuals suffering from certain mental disorders. To conceive a divine being in such terms would imply certain limits on the human community’s control over exchanges with the divine world, both in the form of sacrifice and in the form of communication through authorized spokespeople. As a consequence of the Pkhovian reform, in a sense, the gods retain the appearance of omnipotence while in fact ceding some of their authority to specialist priests and oracles drawn from particular patrilineages in the community.

The socioreligious order observed in 20th-century Pkhovi bears a certain resemblance to that of what R. Hamayon has labelled “pastoral shamanism” in a diachronic study of the religious institutions of the Buryat tribes of Siberia (Hamayon 1996). By contrast with the earlier “hunting shamanism,” in which the shaman, through his status as the “son-in-law” of supernatural game-giving spirits, played an integral role in assuring the success of hunters, in pastoralist Buryat societies the shamanic function has been subordinated to a patrilineally organized ancestor-based religious order. The primary ritual specialists have come to be more like priests, responsible for making offerings of domestic-animal meat and dairy products, or have given way to the clergy of Lamaistic Buddhism. Of particular interest is the peripheralization and feminization of shamanism among the Buryats: Most shamans are now female, their sphere of activity is limited to private matters such as dealing with the troublesome

wandering souls of people who died unnatural or premature deaths. In the case of the Caucasus, it should be noted that there is little evidence of an institution comparable to Buryat “hunting shamanism,” although one might discern similarities between the Pkhovian ballads of the goddess Samdzimari sharing the bed of certain legendary oracles, and the Buryat belief that the shaman had a supernatural wife of animal origin (Charachidzé 1968: 142–144; Hamayon 1996). What is common to both cases is the evident marginalization of “horizontal” inspirational practices – those which are available, in principle, to any member of the society, and which are marked by trance and possession – in favor of the institution of “vertical” inspiration, based on esoteric knowledge controlled by priest-like specialists, a phenomenon which often accompanies increasing sociopolitical complexification and centralization (Hugh-Jones 1996). Although Pkhovi remained a relatively egalitarian society in most respects, the authority and prestige held by the chief priests and their oracles led some Soviet-period ethnographers to employ such terms as “aristocracy” or “theocracy” (Bardavelidze 1957: 34–36). Some of this authority, it appears, came at the expense of the peripheralization and feminization of random (or self-selected) possession in favor of quasi-hereditary oracles, accompanied by the “domestication” of a redoubtable thunderbolt-slinging storm god as K’op’ala, ogre-slayer and liberator of lost souls. One wonders – and it is a question that goes far beyond the modest bounds of this article – whether the restructuring of Pkhovian society rendered it particularly capable of resisting the increasing hegemony of political formations to the north, south, and east, or whether, on the contrary, the restructuring was itself the fruit of that spirit of resistance.

## References Cited

- Abaev, Vasilii I.**  
1949 *Osetinskij jazyk i fol’klor*. Moscow: Izd. Akad. Nauka SSSR.  
1958–1989 *Istoriko-etimologičeskij slovar’ osetinskogo jazyka*. Vols. 1–5. Moscow: Izd. Akad. Nauka SSSR.
- Abak’elia, Nino**  
1991 *Mif i ritual v Zapadnoj Gruzii*. Tbilisi: Mecniereba.
- Akaba, Lili X.**  
1967 *O nekotoryx religioznyx perežitkax u abxazov*. In: L. X. Akaba and S. D. Inal-Ipa (eds.), *Sovremennoe abxazskoe selo. Ètnografičeskie očerki*; pp. 27–51. Tbilisi. Mecniereba.

- 1984 Istoričeskie korni arxaicheskix ritualov abxazov. Suxumi, Alashara.
- 1991 Ancva. In: *MNM*; vol. 1: p. 90.
- Ardzinba, V. G.**
- 1988 K istorii kulta železa i kuznečnogo remesla (počitanie kuznici u abxazov). In: G. M. Bongard-Levin and V. Ardzinba (eds.), *Drevnij Vostok. Ètnokul'turnye svjazi*; pp 263–306. Moscow: Nauka.
- Averincev, S. S.**
- 1991 Ionk Krestitel'. In: *MNM*; vol. 1: pp. 551–553.
- Bat'onishvili, Vaxusht'i**
- 1973 Aghc'era sameposa Sakartvelosa [Description of the Kingdom of Georgia]. In: S. Q'auxchishvili (ed.), *Kartlis cxovreba*. Vol. 4. Tbilisi: Sabch'ota Sakartvelo.
- Baliauri, M., and N. Mak'alatia**
- 1940 Micvalebulis k'ult'i arxot'is temši [The Cult of the Dead in the Commune of Arkhot'i]. *Masalebi sakartvelos etnografiisatvis* 3: 1–64.
- Bardavelidze, Vera**
- 1941a Ivris pšavlebši (dyiuri). *ENIMK'-is moambe* 7: 67–182.
- 1941b Kartvelta udzvelesi sarc'munoebis ist'oriidan: xvtaeba barbar-babar [From the History of the Most Ancient Beliefs of the Georgians. The Deity Barbar-Babar]. Tbilisi: Mecniereba.
- 1957 Drevnejšie religioznye verovanija i obrjadovoe grafičeskoe iskusstvo gruzinskix plemen. Tbilisi: Mecniereba.
- Basilov, V. N., and V. P. Kobychyev**
- 1976 Nikolaji kuvd (Osetinskoe prazdničestvo v čest' patrona selenija). *Kavkazskij ètnografičeskij sbornik* 6: 131–154.
- Benet, Sula**
- 1974 Abkhassians. The Long-Living People of the Caucasus. New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Wilson.
- Benveniste, Émile**
- 1959 Etudes sur la langue ossète. Paris: Klincksieck.
- 1969 Le vocabulaire des institutions indo-européennes. Vol. 2: Pouvoir, droit, religion. Paris: Editions de Minuit.
- Bgazhba, X.**
- 1991 Aytar. In: *MNM*; vol. 1: p. 55.
- Biezais, Haralds**
- 1975 Baltische Religion. In: A. v. Ström und H. Biezais, Germanische und Baltische Religion; pp. 307–384. Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer. (Die Religionen der Menschheit 19,1)
- Bleichsteiner, Robert**
- 1954 Die Blatterngottheiten und die hl. Barbara im Volksglauben der Georgier. In: L. Schmidt (Hrsg.), Kultur und Volk. Beiträge zur Volkskunde aus Österreich, Bayern und der Schweiz; pp. 63–83. Wien: Österreichisches Museum für Volkskunde.
- Burkert, Walter**
- 1961 Elysiion. *Glotta* 39: 208–213.
- Charachidzé, Georges**
- 1968 Le système religieux de la Géorgie païenne. Analyse structurale d'une civilisation. Paris: Maspero.
- 1971 Introduction à l'étude de la féodalité géorgienne. Le Code de Georges le Brillant. Paris: Librairie Droz.
- 1981a Caucase du Nord. In: Y. Bonnefoy (éd.), Dictionnaire des mythologies et des religions des sociétés traditionnelles et du monde antique. Vol. 1; pp. 129–132. Paris: Flammarion.
- 1981b Géorgie. La religion et les mythes des Géorgiens de la montagne. In: Y. Bonnefoy (éd.), Dictionnaire des mythologies et des religions des sociétés traditionnelles et du monde antique. Vol. 1; pp. 451–459. Paris: Flammarion.
- 1986 Prométhée ou le Caucase. Paris: Flammarion.
- 1987 La mémoire indo-européenne du Caucase. Paris: Hachette.
- Chartolani, Mixeil**
- 1961 Kartveli xalxis mat'erialuri k'ult'uris ist'oriidan [From the History of the Material Culture of the Georgian People]. Tbilisi: Mecniereba.
- Chikovani, Mixeil**
- 1972 Kartuli xalxuri p'oezia. Vol. 1: Mitologiuri leksebi, nak'veti p'irveli [Georgian Folk Poetry. Vol. 1: Mythological Poems. Part I]. Tbilisi: Mecniereba.
- Clauson, Gerard**
- 1972 Etymological Dictionary of Pre-13th-Century Turkish. London: Oxford University Press.
- Colarusso, John**
- 2002 Nart Sagas from the Caucasus. Myths and Legends from the Circassians, Abazas, Abkhaz, and Ubykhs. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Cook, Arthur Bernard**
- 1965 Zeus. A Study in Ancient Religion. Vol. 2. New York: Biblo and Tannen.
- Dalgat, Bashir**
- 1893 Pervobytnaja religija čečencev. *Terskii sbornik* 3/2.2: 41–132.
- Dalgat, U. B.**
- 1972 Geroičeskij épos čečencev i ingušej. Moskva: Nauka.
- Dasxuranc'i, Movses**
- 1961 History of the Caucasian Albanians. Transl. by C. J. F. Dowsett. London: Oxford University Press.
- Doerfer, Gerhard**
- 1967 Türkische und mongolische Elemente im Neupersischen unter besonderer Berücksichtigung älterer neupersischer Geschichtsquellen vor allem der Mongolen- und Timuridenzeit. Bd. 3. Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag.
- Dumézil, Georges**
- 1978 Romains de Scythie et d'alentour. Paris: Payot.
- 1995 Mythe et épopée. 3 vols. Paris: Gallimard.
- Eliade, Mircea**
- 1977 Forgerons et alchimistes. Paris: Flammarion.
- Evans-Pritchard, E. E.**
- 1956 Nuer Religion. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Fedorov, Ja. A.**
- 1972 Xazarija i Dagestan. *Kavkazskij ètnografičeskij sbornik* 5: 18–40.
- EWC (The Encyclopedia of World Cultures)*
- 1994 The Encyclopedia of World Cultures. Vol. 6: P. Friedrich and N. Diamond (vol. eds.), Russia and Eurasia/China. Boston: G. K. Hall and Co.
- Gadzhev, M. G.**
- 1991 Rannezemledel'českaja kul'tura severo-vostočnogo Kavkaza. Èpoxa èneolita i rannej bronzy. Moscow: Nauka.

- Gamkrelidze, T., and Vjacheslav V. Ivanov**  
1984 *Indoeuropejskij jazyk i indoeuropejcy*. Tbilisi: Tbilisi State University Press.
- Gej, A. N.**  
1996 Èneolit-bronzovyy vek Kavkaza. Ètnolingvističeskie rekonstrukcii i arxeologičeskie materialy. In: Aktual'nye problemy arxeologii Severnogo Kavkaza. XIX Krupnovskie chtenija; pp. 56–58. Moscow: Rossijskaja Akad. Nauk, Institut arxeologii.
- Gimbutas, Marina**  
1971 *The Slavs*. London: Thames and Hudson.
- Golden, Peter B.**  
1980 *Khazar Studies. An Historico-Philological Inquiry into the Origins of the Khazars*. Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó.  
1992 *An Introduction to the History of the Turkic Peoples. Ethnogenesis and State-Formation in Medieval and Early Modern Eurasia and the Middle East*. Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz.  
1998 Religion among the Qipčaq of Medieval Eurasia. *Central Asiatic Journal* 42: 180–237.
- Goniashvili, Tinatin**  
1971 Kartvelta da nexta k'ult'uruli k'ont'akt'idan. *K'avk'asiis etnografiuli k'rebuli* 3: 213–218.
- Gulia, Dyrmit**  
1928 Kul't kozla (*aš'o'a*) u abxazov. *Sobranie sochinenij* 6: 283–292.
- Haas, Volkert**  
1994 *Geschichte der hethitischen Religion*. Leiden: E. J. Brill.
- Hamayon, Roberte N.**  
1996 Shamanism in Siberia. From Partnership in Supernature to Counter-Power in Society. In: N. Thomas and C. Humphrey (eds.), *Shamanism, History, and the State*; pp. 76–89. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Hubert, Henri, et Marcel Mauss**  
1968 Essai sur la nature et la fonction du sacrifice. In: M. Mauss, *Oeuvres*. Vol. 1: Les fonctions sociales du sacré; pp. 193–307. Paris: Les Editions de Minuit. [Originally published in *L'Année sociologique* 1898]
- Hugh-Jones, Stephen**  
1996 Shamans, Prophets, Priests, and Pastors. In: N. Thomas and C. Humphrey (eds.), *Shamanism, History, and the State*; pp. 32–75. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Inal-Ipa, Shalva D.**  
1965 Abxazcy. Istoriko-ètnografičeskie očerki. Suxumi: Alashara.  
1971 Stranicy istoričeskoj ètnografii abxazov. Suxumi: Alashara.
- Ivanov, Vjaceslav V.**  
1991 Ilija. In: *MNM*; vol. 1: pp. 505–506.
- Ivanov, Vjaceslav V., and Vladimir N. Toporov**  
1965 Slavjanskije jazykovye modelirujuščie semiotičeskie sistemy. Moskva: Nauka.  
1974 Issledovanija v oblasti slavjanskix drevnostej: leksich. i frazeol. Voprosy rekonstruktsii tekstov. Moskva: Nauka.  
1991a Baltijskaja mifologija. In: *MNM*; vol. 1: pp. 151–158.  
1991b Indoeuropejskaja mifologija. In: *MNM*; vol. 1: pp. 527–533.  
1991c Kupala. In: *MNM*; vol. 2: p. 29.  
1991d Perkunas. In: *MNM*; vol. 2: pp. 303–304.  
1991e Perun. In: *MNM*; vol. 2: pp. 306–307.  
1991f Slavjanskaja mifologija. In: *MNM*; vol. 2: pp. 450–456.
- Ixilov, M. M.**  
1967 Narodnosti lezgijskoj gruppi. Maxachkala: Dagestan filial AN SSSR.
- Jaimoukha, Amjad**  
2001 *The Circassians. A Handbook*. Richmond: Curzon Press.
- Jakobson, Roman**  
1985a Linguistic Evidence in Comparative Mythology. *Selected Works* 7: 12–32.  
1985b Slavic Gods and Demons. *Selected Works* 7: 3–11.
- Javakhishvili, Ivane**  
1960 Kartveli eris ist'oria [The History of the Georgian People]. 4 vols. Tbilisi: Tbilisi State University Press. [5th ed.]
- Kaloev, Boris A.**  
1971 Osetiny. Moscow: Nauka.  
1989 Osetinsko-vajnaškie ètnokul'turnye svjazi. *Kavkazskij ètnografičeskij sbornik* 9: 137–158.
- Kantaria, Medea**  
1964 Sameurneo q'opis ist'oriidan q'abardoši [From the History of Agricultural Practice in Kabardia]. *K'avk'asiis etnografiuli k'rebuli* 1: 53–99.  
1982 Q'abardoelebis sameurneo q'opis ist'oriidan [From the History of Kabardian Agricultural Practice]. Tbilisi: Mecniereba.
- Karaketov, M. D.**  
1995 Iz tradicionnoj obrjadovo-kul'tovoj žizni karačaevev. Moscow: Nauka.
- K'ik'nadze, Zurab**  
1996 Kartuli mitologia. Vol. 1: Jvari da saq'mo [Georgian Mythology. Vol. 1: Shrine and Community]. Kutaisi: Gelati Academy of Sciences.
- K'ik'nadze, Zurab (ed.)**  
n. d. Unpublished Corpus of *andrezebi* [Pkhovian Shrine-Foundation Myths].
- Klimov, G. A.**  
1991 Some Thoughts on Indo-European-Kartvelian Relations. *Journal of Indo-European Studies* 19: 325–341.
- Koleva, Tatjana A.**  
1974 Sur l'origine de la fête de Saint-Georges chez les Slaves du Sud. *Ethnologia Slavica* 6: 147–175.
- Kosven, M. O., et al.**  
1960 *Narody Kavkaza*. Vol. 1: Severnyj Kavkaz. Moscow: Nauka.
- Kurdoev, K. K.**  
1960 *Kurdsko-russkij slovar'*. Moskva: Gosud, izd-vo inostrannyx i nacional'nyx slovarej.
- Lincoln, Bruce**  
1981 *Priests, Warriors, and Cattle. A Study in the Ecology of Religions*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Mak'alatia, Mzia**  
1979 Mesakonleobastan dakavširebuli rc'mena-c'armodgenebi samegreloši [Beliefs and Representations Related to Livestock Breeding in Mingrelia]. *Masalebi samegrelos etnografiisatvis* 1: 62–85.
- Mak'alatia, Sergi**  
1935 Xevsureti. Tbilisi: Sakartvelos geografiuli sazogadoeba.



- 1941 Samegrelos ist'oria da etnografia [History and Ethnography of (the Georgian Province of) Mingrelia]. Tbilisi: Sakartvelos mxaretmcodneobis sazogadoeba.
- 1987 Mtis rač'a. Tbilisi: Nak'aduli.
- Mal'sagov, A. U.**  
1991 Elta. In: *MNM*; vol. 1: p. 433.
- Miller, B. V.**  
1960 Persidsko-russkij slovar'. Moskva: Gosud, izd-vo inostrannyx i nacional'nyx slovarej.
- Miller, Vsevolod Fedorovič**  
1927–1934 Osetinsko-russko-nemetskij slovar. Leningrad: Akademiya nauk SSSR.
- Mindadze, Nunu**  
1979 Bavšvta inpekiur daavadebebtan dakavširebuli c'evšvulebebi da rc'mena-c'armodgenebi pšav-xevsuretši [Customs, Beliefs, and Representations Related to Children's Infectious Diseases in Pshav-Khevsureti]. *Masalebi sakartvelos etnografiisatvis* 20: 122–128.  
1981 Kartuli xalxuri medicina [Georgian Folk Medicine]. Tbilisi: Mecniereba.  
2000 Kartuli xalxuri samedicino k'ult'ura [Georgian Folk Medical Culture]. Tbilisi. [Unpublished Ph. D. Thesis, Georgian Academy of Sciences, Institute of History and Ethnography]
- MNM (Mify narodov mira)*  
1991 Mify narodov mira. 2 vols. Edited by S. A. Tokarev. Moscow: Sovetskaja enciklopedia.
- Nagy, Gregory**  
1990 Greek Mythology and Poetics. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Nichols, Johanna**  
1992 Linguistic Diversity in Space and Time. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.  
1997 The Epicenter of the Indo-European Linguistic Spread. In: R. Blench and M. Spriggs (eds.), *Archaeology and Language*. Vol. 1: Theoretical and Methodological Orientations; pp. 122–148. London: Routledge.
- Nilsson, Martin P.**  
1941 Geschichte der griechischen Religion. Bd. 1: Die Religion Griechenlands bis auf die griechische Welt Herrschaft. München: C. H. Beck.
- Nizharadze, Besarion**  
1962 Ist'oriul-etnografiuli c'erilebi. Vol. 1 [Historical-Ethnographic Essays]. Tbilisi: Tbilisi University Press.
- Ochiauri, Aleks**  
1988 Kartuli xalxuri dxeobebis k'alendari: xevsureti [The Calendar of Georgian Folk Holidays: Khevsureti]. Tbilisi: Mecniereba.  
1991 Kartuli xalxuri dxeobebi ačmosavlet sakartvelos mtianetši (pšavi) [Folk Holidays in the East Georgian Mountains: Pshavi]. Tbilisi: Mecniereba.
- Ochiauri, Tinatin**  
1954 Kartvela udzvelesi sarc'munoebis ist'oriidan [From the History of the Ancient Religion of the Georgians]. Tbilisi: Mecniereba.  
1967 Mitologiuri gadmocemebi ačmosavlet sakartvelos mtianetši [Mythological Traditions in the East Georgian Highlands]. Tbilisi: Mecniereba.  
1991 Iaxsari. In: *MNM*; vol. 1: p. 477.
- Pershits, A. I. (ed.)**  
1989 Abaziny: istoriko-etnograficheskie očerki. Cherkessk: Karachaevo-Cherkesskoe otd-nie Stavropolskogo knizhnogo izd-va.
- Pokorny, Julius**  
1959 Indogermanisches etymologisches Wörterbuch. Bd. 1. Bern: Francke Verlag.
- Preobrazhenskij, Aleksandr Grigor'evič**  
1959 Etimologičeskii slovar' russkogo jazyka. Vol. 1. Moskva: Gosud, izd-vo inostrannyx i nacional'nyx slovarej.
- Propp, V. J.**  
1963 Russkie agrarnye prazdniki. Leningrad: Izd. Leningradskogo Universiteta.
- Puhvel, Jaan**  
1989 Comparative Mythology. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Räsänen, Martti**  
1969 Versuch eines etymologischen Wörterbuchs der Türk-sprachen. Helsinki: Suomalais-ugrilainen seura.
- Rix, Helmut, et al.**  
1998 Lexikon der indogermanischen Verben. Wiesbaden: Dr. Ludwig Reichert Verlag.
- Ruxadze, Julieta**  
1999 Bunebis dzalta ačordzinebis xalxuri dyesasc'auli sakartveloši [The Georgian Folk Festival of the Revival of Nature]. Tbilisi: Mecniereba.
- Rybakov, Boris A.**  
1987 Jazičestvo drevnej Rusi. Moscow: Nauka.  
1994 Le paganisme des anciens Slaves. Paris: PUF.
- Sen, Sukumar**  
1971 Etymological Dictionary of Bengali, ca. 1000–1800 A. D. Calcutta: Eastern Publishers.
- Sergent, Bernard**  
1997 Genèse de l'Inde. Paris: Payot.
- Shamanov, Ibragim Magomedovič**  
1994 Balkars. In: *EWG*; vol. 6: pp. 51–54.
- Shu, S. S.**  
1964 Muzyka i tancival'noe iskusstvo. In: M. G. Autlev and L. I. Lavrov (ed.), *Kul'tura i byt kolxonzogo krestjanstva Adygejskoj Avtonomnoj Oblasti*; pp. 177–195. Moskva: Nauka.
- Tankiev, A. X.**  
1991 Sela. In: *MNM*; vol. 2: pp. 423–424.
- Taq'aishvili, Ekvtime**  
1991 Emigrant'uli nashromebi. Vol. 2: Arkeologiuri eksp'edicia lechxum-svanetshi 1910 c'els. Tbilisi: Mecniereba.
- Testen, David**  
1997 Toasting Guests and Hosting Pests: Georgian *alaverdi* and Ossetian *Alardy*. (Paper presented at the Chicago Conference on the Cultures of Caucasia, University of Chicago, May 1997). Chicago.
- Topchishvili, Roland**  
1981 Sak'ult'o dzeglebi rogorc c'q'aro ačmosavlet sakartvelos mtis mosaxleobis migraciis šesasc'avlad [Cultic Monuments As a Source for the Study of the Migration of the Population of the East Georgian Highlands]. *Masalebi sakartvelos etnografiisatvis* 21: 99–107.

- 1984 Aḡmosavlet sakartvelos mtis mosaxleobis migracia XVII–XX ss-ši [Migration of the Populations of the East Georgian Highlands in the 17th–20th Centuries]. Tbilisi: Mecniereba.
- Toporov, V.**  
1991 Indra. In: *MNM*; vol. 1: pp. 533–535.
- Tuite, Kevin**  
1994 Anthology of Georgian Folk Poetry. Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press.  
1998 Representations of Social Space in South Caucasian and Indo-European Ideology. *Cosmos* 14/1: 9–20.  
2000 Anti-Marriage in Ancient Georgian Society. *Anthropological Linguistics* 42/1: 37–60.  
2001 Real and Imagined Feudalism in Highland Georgia. *Amirani* 7: 25–43.  
2002 The Meaning of Dæl. Symbolic and Spatial Associations of the South Caucasian Goddess of Game Animals. [Unpublished Ms.]
- Tuite, Kevin, and P'aat'a Bukhrashvili**  
1999 Binarität und Komplementarität in Nordostgeorgien. Die Vorstellung von Jungen und Mädchen am Iaxsari-Heiligtum. *Georgica* 22: 59–72.
- Tuite, Kevin, and Wolfgang Schulze**  
1999 A Case of Taboo-Motivated Lexical Replacement in the Indigenous Languages of the Caucasus. *Anthropological Linguistics* 40/3: 363–383.
- Turner, R. L.**  
1962–1966 A Comparative Dictionary of the Indo-Aryan Languages. 11 vols. London: Oxford University Press.
- Valeri, Valerio**  
1985 Kingship and Sacrifice. Ritual and Society in Ancient Hawaii. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Vasmer, Max**  
1953 Russisches etymologisches Wörterbuch. Bd. 1. Heidelberg: Winter.
- Vazha-Pshavela**  
1994 K'op'ala da iaxsari – devebis mebrdzolni [K'op'ala and Iaxsar, Ogre-Fighters]. *Tsxulebani* 5: 133–137. [1889]
- Vielle, Christophe**  
1997 Le mytho-cycle héroïque dans l'aire indo-européenne. Louvain-la-Neuve: Peeters.
- Virsaladze, Elene**  
1976 Gruzinskij oxotničij mif i poëzija. Moscow: Nauka, Glavnaja redakcija vostočnoj literatury.
- Volkova, Natalia G.**  
1989 Ètnokul'turnye kontakty narodov Gornogo Kavkaza v obščestvennom byte (XIX – načalo XX v.). *Kavkazskij ètnografičeskij sbornik* 9: 159–215.  
1994 Khinalughs. In: *EWG*; vol. 6: pp. 197–202.
- Wahby, Taufiq, and C. J. Edmonds**  
1966 Kurdish-English Dictionary. London: Oxford University Press.
- Watkins, Calvert**  
1995 How to Kill a Dragon. Aspects of Indo-European Poetics. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Xaradze, Rusudan, and A. Robakidze**  
1964 Svanetis sopeli dzvelad [The Svanetian Village in Earlier Times]. Tbilisi: Sabch'ota Sakartvelo.
- Zelenin, D. K.**  
1991 Vostočnoslavjanskaja ètnografija. Moscow: Nauka, Glavnaja redakcija vostočnoj literatury.
- Zempléni, Andras**  
1987 Des êtres sacrificiels. In: M. Cartry (éd.), *Sous le masque de l'animal. Essais sur le sacrifice en Afrique noire*; pp. 267–317. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.