

Linguistic Analysis of Toponyms of the Dali Gorge

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Abstract. This study presents a linguistic analysis of three geographical names from the Dali Gorge – Gvandra, Kodori and Namshikhvi – examining their origins, historical background and a new etymological interpretation within the context of Caucasian studies. Without toponymy, it is impossible to reconstruct the history, culture and language of any nation. In many cases, a geographical name contains more information than historical document, sources or scholarly work can provide. It is impossible to write the history of Georgia without linguistic analysis of its historical geography. The Dali Gorge is a historical part of the western Georgia, Abkhazia and its toponymy is characterized by linguistic diversity and a completely different chronology of records in the sources. The toponyms of the Kodori Valley mentioned in ancient and medieval sources are mainly of Svan origin. The names of several pastures, mountains, villages and rivers are of Abkhazian origin. The names of villages and passes, the entire microtoponymy, most of the hydronyms, dryonyms, oikonyms are of Svan origin. Among the toponyms of the Dali Gorge in the “Census of the Kingdom of Georgia” written by Vakhushti Bagrationi in the 18th century, “Kodori” is attested as hydronym. Based on a detailed linguistic and anthropological analysis, the origins and etymology of these three geographical names from the Dali Gorge can be outlined as follows: Oikonym – Namshikhvi Svan. < N□-m-šix-□ < li-šx-i, meaning “burnt” (It is noteworthy that this mountain, Namshikhvi, has also been named Goghlaura in honor of the renowned Georgian poet Giorgi Leonidze who visited the Dali Gorge in the 1950s). Oikonym – Gvandra, Svan < gval, meaning “cattle shed, cow stall”. Hydronym – Kodori, Svan < kved, meaning “spring, water source”. © 2025 Bull. Georg. Natl. Acad. Sci.

Keywords: Dali, Svan, Kodori, ethnolinguistics, toponymy, Kartvelology

Introduction

Toponymy plays a vital role in reconstructing the history, culture and language of any nation. In many cases, a geographical name contains more information than historical document, sources, or scholarly work can provide. The history of Georgia cannot be written without linguistic analysis of historical geography. Toponymy is often referred to as the

"language of the earth", for when it “begins to speak”, many secrets hidden in it are disclosed. Every toponym is simultaneously a product and chronicler of the past days reflecting the material and spiritual life of our distant or near ancestors.

Onomastics is a branch of linguistics where the interests of linguists, historians, and ethnographers are united, considering the possibilities of researching different aspects of personal names. The

Dali Gorge is rich in onomastic material. The Svan onomastics of the Dali (Kodori) Gorge includes geographical names, anthroponyms (surname system, family branches), hydronyms, micro toponyms, botany, mythonyms, zoonyms, the names of archaeological monuments, shrines, fortresses in the Kodori valley, etc. Many famous scholars or Kartvelologists got interested in Svan toponymy. Significant conclusions are also made as a result of this study: analysis of toponymic material of Svaneti and its adjacent territories is clearly stated in the references of ancient Greek historian Strabo. In the toponymy of Racha-Lechkhumi, Upper Svaneti and mountainous Samegrelo is obviously found the sign of Svan language meaning that this territory was once inhabited by the Svans. Similar evidence is also found in the North Caucasus as demonstrated by toponyms such as Khumar (comp. Tskhumari), Ushkalan (comp. Ushkul) etc. (Chumburidze, et al., 2007; Lavrov, 1950).

Discussion and Results

This work presents a linguistic analysis of three geographical names from the Dali Gorge - Gvandra, Kodori and Namshikhvi – offering origin, history, a new etymological interpretation within the context of the Caucasian studies.

1. Gvandra is the name of a village, mountain, river, pass. It is multifunctional toponym, and should be related to the Svan word, the archaic lexeme (**gval** - "cattle-shed, cattle(cow) stall"). The village of Gvandra is located on the slopes of the mountain near the village Omarishali, where the river **Gvandrala** flows, which sources from the mountains of Gvandra, joins the **Saknara** river and forms the basin and headwaters of the Kodori river: **gvand-ra** < Sv. **gval** "cattle-shed, cattle(cow) stall". The parallels from the toponymy of Svaneti are noteworthy: **Gvald-er-i** is a village in Upper Svaneti, **Gval-da** is the name of the mountain between Mestia and Mulakhi. The small river **Gval-d-iri** sources from this mountain. The root of all these toponyms is **gval-**, which means "cattle(cow) stall" in Svan. Its

diminutive form is **Gval-da**, from which the village name **Gvalderi** is originated by adding the **er** allomorph, and the river name **Gvaldiri** by adding the **ir** one (Chumburidze, Nijaradze, Kurdadze, 2007).

The toponym of the Dali Gorge, **Gvandra**, should be a geographical name derived from the Svan **gval** lexeme: **Gvandra** < **Gvald** < **Gval**. The alternation of sonants **n** and **m** is a natural process characteristic of the Kartvelian languages.

Segmentation of the toponym **Gvandra**: **Gvand-ra**, in which **gvand** < **gval** is the root, **-d** is of diminutive form, **-ra** is a fairly widespread Svan topo-formant. According to M. Kaldani, "It should be noted that some of the names of the rivers of the former Misimianeti and present-day Svaneti regions contain the same **-ra** suffix: **Gvand-ra**, **Sakna-ra**, **Adzga-ra**, **Aja-ra**, **Khetstskva-ra**... In Svan similar formation is observed in the names of the rivers: **Dol-ra**, **Kal-ra**, **Mulkhu-ra**, **Nak-ra**" (Kaldani, 1970).

2. Kodori is the name of a river and a gorge located in western Georgia. Regarding the etymology of hydronym Kodori, various opinions have been expressed in onomastic literature: **T. Mibchuani** links it with Svan **qadar** meaning "dry" and considers it a Zanized variant; (Mibchuani, 1989), From Z. Chumburidze (Chumburidze et al., 2007) and by K. Margiani's standpoint, despite the problem of root vowel length, **Kodori** is considered to be derived from the Svan lexeme **sk□di** "deep" via the loss of the initial consonant and **-or** topoformants (Margiani, 1998) I. Chantladze connected the name of the river with the Georgian word **nakaduli** "stream" (na-**qad**-ul-i): **Kodori** < na- **qad**-ul-i; **Kodori** < la- **qad**-a (Chantladze, Margiani, Margiani-Subari, Sagliani, Ioseliani, 2007-2010). Kh. Bghazhba considers it necessary to take into account the parallels in the territory of the North Caucasus: **Kuda-ko**, **Kude-Psta** in the Sochi region, **Kudir-ta** in the Bzipi region (Bghazhba, 1956).

This study presents a completely new interpretation and etymology of the geographical name end hydronym Kodori. Based on the processing of the

archaic Svan language dictionaries, according to the results of the research and multiple verifications with Svan informants, the name of the river **Kodori** should be etymologically related to the Svan lexeme **ḵved** meaning "source/spring". **Kodori** < Sv. **ḵved** "source/spring". It is a well-known fact that by common consent, Kartvelologists unconditionally recognize richness and archaic nature of the Svan vocabulary. Several lexemes with different semantic nuances are attested in Svan to denote a source/spring: 1. **sarag** /**saräg**, 2. **mazûäb**, 3. **ḵədäld**, 4. **ḵved** /**ḵüed**; I believe that the hydronym **Kodori** is derived just from the latter, as research has shown (**ḵodor** < Sv. **ḵved**). Semantic nuances of the four Svan lexemes denoting a source/spring are followings: **ḵved** / **ḵüed** is "a spring, water rising from the ground with roar", onto which they used to build a mortared stone to dam up. This differs it from **ḵvedsarag** / **saräg**, which also denotes a source/spring but such a source, which necessarily flows from a tree groove. Svan **ḵədäld** is "the source of a small debit", and **mazûäb** is "the water of the spring". It is noteworthy that **ḵved** is not confirmed in Topuria-Kaldani's Svan dictionary. A. Liparteliani explains as follows: "ḵved "source/small, drainless basin of water (Liparteliani, 1994). From the semantic standpoint, as well as taking into account the rules of Svan phonotactics and Kartvelian onomastic regularities, I believe that the etymology (hydronym **ḵodori** < Sv. **ḵved** "source, small pool of water") is not contradicted: the complex **üe** / **ve** > **o** is a natural process in Svan. Accordingly, the name of the main river of historical Misimianeti, the present-day Dali Gorge, must be etymologically related to the Sv. **ḵved** "spring, basin". In general, it should be noted that this part of Georgia, bearing the name of the hunting goddess (Dali), is characterized by the abundance of Svan geographic names with noteworthy structural and semantic features. I'll bring a couple of examples: e.g. The name of the mountain is **Murḳmilär** "towers" (dim. form), the name of the village is **Yaltsunesga** "interfluves".

Murḳmilär: It should be noted that the Svan language has the ability to form a diminutive form from any name: e.g. Sv. **mi ž** "sun" - **mi žäld** diminutive form of "sun"; **ḵož** "rock" - **ḵožäld** diminutive form of "rock". It is noted that similar forms are widespread mainly in the mountains of Georgia. **Murḳm-il-är** sources from the Svan lexeme **murḳyam** "tower". Near the Klukhori pass, in the Dali Gorge, the mountain is called **Murḳmilär**, or rather, the mountain chain, where several peaks are located side by side really evoke the association of towers in the viewer, and the unique landscape leaves an indelible impression on the tourist forever. Segmentation: **murḳm-il-är** (Sv. **murḳüam** "tower"). -**il** of diminutive suffix, -**är** of plural, i.e. word-for-word "towers" diminutive form. In general, the microtoponymy of Dali Gorge is characterized by the abundance of environment describing terms. Geographical phenomena and lexemes, such as ravine, gorge, rock, the places where there used to be towers, lake, mountain, brook, pass, hill, hillock, knoll, grassland, cliff, slope, risen river, landslip, waterfall, mountain top. Including morphemoids - down, downwards, upward, eastern-western, etc.

Ialtsunesga is an interfluves river: The village of **Ialcunēsga** is located at the head of the Dali Gorge, at the foot of the Klukhori Pass, near the border of Georgia from the Karachay-Cherkessia side, between **Saknara** and **Gvandralla** rivers. The location, the geographical landscape, the location between two rivers became the motivation for the toponym naming for this village: Sv. **Ialcunēsga** < **Iarvlicnēsga** < **Iori-lic-nēsga** "between two waters, between two rivers". Taking into account the phonetic changes, word-for-word it means "between two waters, between two rivers" (phonetic changes were caused by the neighborhood of sonors, loss of **r**, labialization, reduction of **i** vowel in intervocalic position). In this way, we got the second name of the village Omarishali (in Svan pronunciation **Omarishāl** "Omaraanti") – **Ialcunēsga**, the same the interfluves of Dali Gorge, **Ialcunēsga** – Kodori

interfluves. Residents of other villages of the Dali Gorge - the Gentsvishians, Gvandrians, Ajarians, Khutians, Sakenians ... are called Omarishians and were referred to by the name **Ialcunēsgāl** "inhabitants of Ialtsunesga", literally – "people of interfluves" (Margiani, 2022).

3. **Namshikhvi** is the name of a mountain/range. This mountain with beautiful landscapes, Alpine meadows, rocks and bear rock summits is located at the head of the Kodori Gorge, along the village of Omarishali, near the Klukhori Pass, at the junction of the Gvandra and Quluchi rivers. The literary Georgian form of this geographical name is **Namshikhvi**, and in the Svan pronunciation - **Nāmshikhū**. The toponym is of Svan explanation and is the participle of the verb **lišxi** "to burn", meaning "burnt stub, burnt". The segmentation is as follows: **Nāmšixū** < **Nām-šix-ū** < **li-šx-i** "to burn, to burn up", (cf. Geo. **na-xš-iri** < Sv.**na-šix-ir-i**). In **Nām-šix-ū** the confix **nā-ū** is the formant of the past tense participle, **šix** – is a root morpheme, sonor **m** – a phonetic inclusion which is a natural feature in Svan. It is worth noting that this mountain (**Namshikhvi**) has been named **Goglaura** in honor of the great Georgian poet **Giorgi Leonidze** (pseudonym **Gogla**), who had visited the Dali Gorge in the 1950s.

Dali Gorge is a historical part of the West Georgia, Apkhazia. In the antiquity, it was known as Mivisianeti or Misimianeti, in the Middle Ages - Dali Gorge, in XIX century – Tsebelda Dali Sabokaulo (the area controlled by a local police department), in the Soviet epoch it was called Apkhazian Svaneti, and in XXI century – Upper Apkhazia. Such a variety of the names speaks for itself, of the importance and special role of this gorge in the history of Georgia. Svaneti of Dali is located on the southern slopes of the Western Caucasus, in the upper part of the gorge of the Kodori river. It is bordered by Karachay-Cherkessia, Russia from the north. The valley benefits from a favorable geographical location through the following passes –

Klukhori, Naharvi, Marukhi. Dali Gorge is the shortest way connecting the coastal region of Georgia with the North Caucasus. This explains the strategic function assigned to Kodori Gorge in all historical eras. The toponymy of the Dali Gorge is characterized by linguistic diversity and a completely different chronology of records in the sources. The toponyms of the Kodori valley mentioned in ancient and medieval sources (**Pusta, Chikhari/Chkhaltā, Lagvana, Shokeri/Shikeri, Boker/Boger...**) are mainly of Svan origin. The names of several pastures, mountains, villages and rivers are of Abkhazian origin (**Armua, Atchapara, Achara, Adzgara, Soipsara, Akakua, Jejera, Abaqua, Mramba, Siribista, Argun, Adzmakh, Douch, Dedukefta**). The names of villages and passes, the entire microtoponymy, most of the hydronyms, dryonyms, oikonyms (**Gentshvisi, Tishi, Naharvi, Kodori, Khuarashi, Lata, Sakeni, Yaltsunesga, Gwandrala, Saknara...**) are of Svan origin. Megrelian, Russian and other names of uncertain etymology within Dali Gorge are found in the geographical nomenclature rarely. Microtoponymy of the Dali Gorge is known by the abundance and variety of the terms of landscape and natural geographic environment. Svan speech of Dali Gorge is famous with its interference. It is very interesting segment of Georgian dialectological field (Margiani, 2018).

The cultural anthropology of the Dali Gorge covers and thematically integrates key issues of Kartvelologically topical themes such as the Bronze Age and Hellenistic archaeological sites; history of the Kodori Gorge; early medieval fortresses, sites of former churches, prayer houses and Christian monuments; onomastics (toponymy, anthroponymy, theonymy, hydronymy, zoonymy) of the Dali Gorge. The Kodorian Svan speech examined through the interference patterns and ethnolinguistic aspects represents a key area of this research. Consequently, scholarly interest in the Kodori Gorge, or Dali country (as the travelers of early periods call it!), is multifaceted. The onomastic domains of Kodori

Gorge plays a central role in creating this portrait. It can be safely said that the study of the onomastic, linguistic, historical, folklore materials of Dali Gorge with linguistic and cultural aspects will give the opportunity to make quite interesting conclusions in Kartveliology.

Conclusion

This publication presents a linguistic analysis of three geographical names from the Dali Gorge - Gvandra, Kodori and Namshikhvi – offering a new etymological interpretation within the context of the Caucasian studies. Based on a detailed linguistic and anthropological analysis, the origins and etymology of these three geographical names from the Dali Gorge can be outlined as follows:

Oikonym - **Namshikhvi**, Svan. < **Nām-šix-ŋ** < **li-šx-i**, meaning “burnt” (It is noteworthy that this mountain, Namshikhvi, has also been named **Goglaura** in honor of the renowned Georgian poet Giorgi Leonidze who visited the Dali Gorge in the 1950s).

Oikonym - **Gvandra**, Svan < **gval**, meaning “cattle shed, cow stall”.

Hydronym - **Kodori**, Svan < **kved**, meaning “spring, water source”.

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ენათმეცნიერება

დალის ხეობის ტოპონიმების ლინგვისტური ანალიზი

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(წარმოდგენილია აკადემიის წევრის ა. არაბულის მიერ)

ნაშრომში წარმოდგენილია დალის ხეობის სამი გეოგრაფიული სახელის (გვანდრა, კოდორი, ნამშიხვი) კვლევა, ლინგვისტური ანალიზი; ჰიდრონიმი კოდორის ახლებური ეტიმოლოგია მოცემულია წინარე ქართველოლოგიური კვლევებისა და კავკასიოლოგიური კონტექსტის გათვალისწინებით. ტოპონიმის გარეშე შეუძლებელია ხალხთა ისტორიის, წარსულის, ენის შესწავლა. გეოგრაფიულ სახელში, ხშირ შემთხვევაში, მოცემულია ხოლმე დიდი ინფორმაცია გარდასულ ეპოქებზე. ამიტომაც სრულიად დამსახურებულად ტოპონიმის უწოდებენ „დედამიწის ენას“, რომელსაც „ამეტყველების“ შემთხვევაში შეუძლია გვაზიაროს მრავალ საიდუმლოს. დალის ხეობა ისტორიული მხარეა დასავლეთ საქართველოში, აფხაზეთში. ამ

მხარეს ანტიკურ ეპოქაში მივსიანეთი, ანუ მისიმიანეთი ეწოდებოდა, შუა საუკუნეებში – დაღის ხეობა, XIX საუკუნეში – წებელდა-დაღის საბოქაულო, საბჭოთა ეპოქაში – აფხაზეთის სვანეთი, XXI საუკუნეში – ზემო აფხაზეთი. უაღრესად ხელსაყრელი გეოგრაფიული მდებარეობით – კლუხორის, მარუხის, ნაჰარის უღელტეხილებით ისტორიული დაღის ხეობა არის დასავლეთ საქართველოს ზღვისპირა რეგიონის ჩრდილოეთ კავკასიასთან დამაკავშირებელი უმოკლესი გზა, რაც ამ ხეობას ყოველ ისტორიულ ეპოქაში განსაკუთრებულ მნიშვნელობას, სტრატეგიულ ფუნქციას აკისრებდა. დაღის ხეობის ტოპონიმია ხასიათდება ენობრივი მრავალფეროვნებით, დაფიქსირების სხვადასხვა ქრონოლოგიით. ანტიკური ხანისა და შუა საუკუნეების წყაროებში მოხსენიებული კოდორის ხეობის ტოპონიმები ძირითადად სვანური წარმოშობისაა (ჩიხარი, (ფუსტა, ლაგვანა, შიყერი, ზოგერი); აფხაზურენოვანია საზაფხულო საძოვრების, მთების, იალაღების სახელები (არმუა, აძგარა, სოიფსარა, აკაკუა, აბაყუა, ანუყუა, ქუთარბა, მრამბა, შოჭ, ამმახ, სირბისტა, არგუნ, დოუზ, დედუქეფთა, აჯარა, ჯეჯერა); სვანურია სოფლებისა და უღელტეხილების სახელები, მთელი მიკროტოპონიმია, ჰიდრონიმების უმეტესობა, დრიმონიმები, ოიკონიმები (გენწვიში, ტიიში, ნაჰარვი, კოდორი, ხუარაში, აჭაფარა, ხუტია, ნამშიხვი, ხითაი, ლათა, საკენი, იალცუნესგა, გვანდრალა, საკნარა...). დეტალური ლინგვისტური, ანთროპოლოგიური ანალიზის საფუძველზე ნაშრომში წარმოდგენილი დაღის ხეობის სამი გეოგრაფიული სახელის ისტორია, ეტიმოლოგია შემდეგი სახით წარმოჩნდება: ოიკონიმი - ნამშიხვი < სვან. ნამშიხვ „ნახანძრალი, ნამწვავი“ (აღსანიშნავია, რომ ამ მთას დიდი პოეტის გიორგი ლეონიძის პატივსაცემად გოგლაურას უწოდებენ). ოიკონიმი – გვანდრა < სვან. გვალ „ზაგა, სასაქონლე, ზოსელი“. ჰიდრონიმი – კოდორი < სვან. კვედ „აუზი, წყარო“.

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