

Ossetians in Georgian Documentary Sources of the 17th-18th Centuries

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the settlement and establishment of the Ossetian population in Georgia, based on historical documents preserved at the K. Kekelidze Georgian National Center of Manuscripts. Documentary sources constitute the primary evidence regarding the settlement of the Ossetian population in Georgia. At the beginning of the seventeenth century, Ossetian migration began into the territory of present-day Georgia. They engaged in raiding campaigns for the purpose of plunder, a practice that later became known as „Ossetian-ism“. Some of the migrating Ossetians became serfs of local feudal lords, received land, and fulfilled feudal obligations. The royal government and feudal lords sought to increase the number of serfs and peasants at the expense of the settled Ossetians, thereby boosting state revenues. To this end, they created conditions that enabled Ossetians to settle on the land. A significant number of Ossetians sought to enter the king's direct service as dominion serfs. The adaptation of mountain tribal societies to the feudal system proved difficult. Ossetian serfs often faced difficulties in their relations with Georgian feudal lords. Documentary sources indicate that they frequently did not pay taxes and refused to fulfill feudal obligations. Attacks and robberies committed by the settled Ossetians against the local population became so widespread that the authority of the local feudal lords proved insufficient, prompting the royal government to intervene to restore order. The royal government sought to reconcile Ossetian criminals by demanding hostages from them as a guarantee of peace and by providing for their protection. In addition, the royal government attempted to reconcile Georgians and Ossetians, requiring both sides to promise non-interference and mutual assistance.

Keywords: Ossetians, documentary sources, occupied Tskhinvali region

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INTRODUCTION

Graphic language or written culture serves as a paramount marker of national identity. Manuscript heritage clearly reflects the societal attributes of its creators, encapsulating essential information about a region's administrative, ecclesiastical, cultural, and everyday communicative practices. Moreover, manuscripts constitute an intellectual heritage, mirroring the collective thought and intellectual milieu of the society that produced them. Through both their external features and intrinsic content, manuscripts stand as self-explanatory monuments.

Documentary material within manuscript heritage is highly reliable. In Georgia, where the falsification of the history of occupied territories has become a politically significant issue, the study of documentary sources has acquired renewed importance. These sources, in addition to serving their social function, also reflect the period's political, legal, ideological, and cultural conceptions.

The K. Kekelidze Georgian National Center for Manuscripts preserves hundreds of documents concerning the occupied Tskhinvali region. These documents are diverse in content and present the region's history from multiple perspectives. Documents relating to the settlement of the Ossetian population in the region and their activities are critical.

The Alan-Ossetians resided in the northern regions of Georgia, maintaining connections with Georgians since ancient times. These relations were predominantly peaceful, characterized by Georgian kings employing Ossetian soldiers and entering into dynastic marriages. However, occasional military conflicts also occurred.

Weakened by the invasions of the Mongols and Tamerlane and subsequently oppressed by the Kabardians, the Ossetians left the fertile fields of the North Caucasus in the fourteenth century and fled to the gorges of the Caucasus. The harsh and scarce nature of the mountainous terrain pushed them to seek new sources of income. The Ossetians assimilated the Dvals in the Nar-Mamisoni Cave and, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, moved to the southern slopes of the Caucasus Mountains, mainly into the Kingdom of Kartli.

METHODS

The article critically examines documentary material preserved at the National Center of Manuscripts, which is distinguished by its high reliability. The authors' goal is to allow the documentary material to speak for itself, rather than relying on preinterpreted knowledge in scientific works. Along with documentary sources, the study also uses narrative sources that reflect the realities of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. A historical-comparative analysis has been conducted to examine how Ossetians are represented in various types of documentary sources. One of the key components of this work's methodological basis is the principle of historicism, which enables the authors to examine the issue in the context of various historical events. In addition, the authors address the identification and localization of historical figures and places, as well as the definition of historical terms, which facilitate the understanding of the documents' texts and, accordingly, the article.

RESULTS

Ossetian migration to the territory of present-day Georgia began in the early seventeenth century. This movement was driven by two principal factors: (1) organizing raids for plunder, which resulted in the phenomenon known as “Ossianism” ([Itonishvili, 1996, pp. 228–257](#)); and (2) “peaceful” resettlement from sparsely populated mountain areas to fertile agricultural regions. In the first case, the marauding Ossetians maintained their clan-based lifestyle, whereas in the second, they integrated into the local feudal society and entered into vassal relations. They lived as migrant peasants on the lands of Georgian landlords and consequently paid taxes to them ([Berdzenishvili, 1990, p. 608](#)). Migrant peasants retained the right to leave the land, and landlords were likewise entitled to evict them. Over time, other categories of Ossetian peasants emerged ([Togoshvili, 1969, p. 207](#)). Even though the migrant Ossetian peasants involved in feudal relations suffered from Ossetian raids ([Gamkrelidze, 1996, p. 191](#)), their adaptation to Georgian feudal society was challenging. They found it difficult to abandon the characteristics of their mountain tribal community, and numerous instances occurred in which those who entered serfdom under various feudal lords refused to pay taxes.

DISCUSSION

No extant documentary sources describe Ossetian migration into the mountains of Shida Kartli prior to the seventeenth century. It is only in the records from this period that we find evidence of Ossetian raids and their subsequent settlement as vassals and peasants on the lands of Georgian landlords.

The first Ossetian settlements appeared in the headwaters of the Great Liakhvi River. The Ossetians who migrated to the Shida Kartli mountain range initially lived separately in the forests, without forming rural settlements, and relied solely on hunting rather than agriculture ([Topchishvili, 1997, p. 140](#)). Their early migration was characterized by aggression, with Ossetians occupying the Shida Kartli lands through violent confrontations. A document from the seventeenth century, the “purchase book of the estate given by Ivane and Zakaria to Kuabul and Zaal Machabelis,” vividly describes the dire situation created by the Ossetian invasions in the headwaters of the Great Liakhvi. It states: “The region of Upper Jaba was ravaged, the Ossetians were displaced. God stands as a witness; it was thoroughly devastated, devoid of any trace of human construction.”

In such a situation, Ivan and Zakaria sold the Dziganidze estate in Upper Java to Kuabul and Zaal Machabeli. Dziganidze and his heir were lost, and this land was the inheritance of Ivan and Zakaria. The document continues: “We sold you the estate at a time of unimaginable hardship, when the mother was forced to eat two or three children, a man to sell his wife and stay alone. At that time, a terrible hardship befell us. From a family of ten, only five remained... God bless you; your purchase of our estate during the bleak time was a godsend rescuing us from the brink of despair. Without your intervention, we would have surely been lost” ([Korneli Kekelidze National Centre of Manuscripts Hd-1959, 1621–1650](#)).

The Ossetian settlement in Georgia occurred in an uncoordinated and irregular manner. The royal authorities and feudal lords sought to regulate this process and use it to their advantage. The demographic crisis in the Shida Kartli mountains and foothills made the arrival of a new productive force in the form of the Ossetians beneficial for both central and local rulers ([Topchishvili, 2021a, pp. 35–36](#)). Ossetian vassals were resettled in the mountains of Shida Kartli with the support of the royal authorities and the feudal lords of Kartli, as confirmed by documentary sources. For example, King Rostom's order to officials emphasized the inviolability of the Ossetians who were expelled from Ossetia and from the area above Java (1633–1658) ([Documentary, 2021, p. 489](#)).

It was important for the Georgian kings to repopulate territories left vacant by local populations during enemy invasions. Consequently, they settled foreign tribes, including the Ossetians, predominantly in the Shida Kartli region. Furthermore, the country's economic and military strength was significantly bolstered by the increase in the number of vassals.

While describing the Liakhvi Gorge, Vakhushti Batonishvili noted: "No matter how many Ossetians we have settled in these places, Georgian peasants were settled here first. After that, the Ossetians and Georgians, displaced by their owners, moved to the valley, because the number of people in the valley decreased drastically due to the enemies" ([Batonishvili Vakhushti, 1973, pp. 363–364](#)). Consequently, the Ossetians who migrated to the mountains of Shida Kartli became the vassals of the local feudal lords, including Machabeli, the Eristavi of Ksani, and Palavandishvili, among others.

Part of the Ossetians who settled in Shida Kartli became dominion vassals. After the abolition of the Saeristavo of Ksani in 1779, King Erekle declared the inhabitants of the Little Liakhvi Gorge, including the Ossetians, as well as the Ossetians of Gvidisi, Portisi, Tleeli, and Chiprane, to be dominion serfs (Ad-870). Additionally, the properties of the nobles, peasants, and Ossetians living in Gverdisdziri (Saeristavo of Ksani) were declared dominion estates ([Korneli Kekelidze National Centre of Manuscripts Hd-14759 b, 1786, 15. IX](#)).

The Ossetians who had been resettled petitioned Erekle II to become vassals: "If you don't make us vassals and don't patronize us, we will not stay there." While the king pledged protection to the Ossetians in both valleys, he emphasized the need for their compliance. He insisted they adhere to the established rules of serfdom and fulfill their obligations to him ([Korneli Kekelidze National Centre of Manuscripts Hd-2210, 1795, 1. VII](#)).

Similarly, King Giorgi XII (1798–1800) of Kartli-Kakheti sought to encourage Ossetian settlement in Kartli, issuing a decree in 1799 to resettle Ossetians from Tagaura to Kartli. He emphasized his benevolent intentions, declaring, "As our longing Father was merciful to you, we will be even more merciful... You will be our dominion vassals, so that no one else will ever say anything to you" ([Korneli Kekelidze National Centre of Manuscripts Qd-1617](#)). The king entrusted the noble Ninia Gabashvili with the task of negotiation, assuring the Ossetians of a temporary settlement in Dighomi and promising eventual relocation to a more favorable location ([Korneli Kekelidze National Centre of Manuscripts Qd-1617](#)). However, the settled Ossetians began plundering the local population, prompting the inhabitants to expel them. Records from the early nineteenth-century census of the village

of Dighomi attest to the absence of Ossetian residents, suggesting their departure from the area ([Topchishvili, 2019, p. 46](#)).

The royal government provided bread, flour, cheese, meat, wine, and fabric to Ossetians who had moved to Shida Kartli. Many documents of this series have survived ([Korneli Kekelidze National Centre of Manuscripts Hd-2210, Hd-292, Hd-11763, Hd-13376, Hd-13354, Hd-13331, Hd-12836, Hd-12703, Hd-12580, Hd-13388, Hd-12294](#)).

Evidently, the Ossetians settled within the dominion estates of Shida Kartli were categorized as dominion vassals. Following the dissolution of the Ksani Saeristavo, this domain fell under the jurisdiction of the Batonishvili family. Ioane Batonishvili held sway over the gorges of Ksani, Sapesheti, Alevi, Tskhramze, Churti, Karchokhi, and Zhamuri. Meanwhile, Iulon Batonishvili presided over Patara Liakhvi Gorge and Gverdisdziri, and Bagrat Batonishvili claimed authority over Mejudi and Isroli Gorges, Sakorintlo, and Kolot-Kvitkiri ([Gvritishvili, 1955, p. 330](#)).

A map delineating the villages of Bagrat Batonishvili in the Rukhuli Valley provides insight into the settlements of members of the royal family in the mountainous terrain of Shida Kartli ([Korneli Kekelidze National Centre of Manuscripts, Hd-1464, 1789, late eighteenth century](#)). The “List of Villages of Bagrat Batonishvili in Rukhuli Gorge” provides insight into the villages owned by members of the royal family in the highland region of Shida Kartli. This document lists the Georgian villages of Bagrat Batonishvili in the “Rukhuli¹ Gorge”: Sakorintlo, Isroli Gorge, and Mejuda – Koloti, Second Koloti, Vani, Kolot-Kvitkiriani, and others – as well as Ossetian villages including Kardisi, Kashaturi, Tba, Valishvilebi, Benderi, Nakalakevi, and others. According to another document, Bagrat Batonishvili possessed lands in Isroliskhevi, Ashaturi, Koloti, Sakorintlo, Meria Nakalakevi, Boselta, and Tskhratskaro. The title deeds for these properties were lost during Agha-Mohammed Khan’s invasion, prompting Giorgi Batonishvili to renew the book of the lands for Ketevan² on April 14, 1796 ([Korneli Kekelidze National Centre of Manuscripts Hd-1522](#)). The ownership of lands in Isroliskhevi, Koloti, and Mejvriskhevi by Bagrat Batonishvili is documented in an edict issued by Davit Batonishvili, the heir to the royal throne of Kartli-Kakheti and the governor of the kingdom ([Korneli Kekelidze National Centre of Manuscripts Hd-1499, 1801. 27. II](#)). On June 21, 1798, King Giorgi XII bestowed the Ksani Gorge upon Ioane Batonishvili ([Korneli Kekelidze National Centre of Manuscripts Hd-14759 d](#)). Additionally, Ketevan, the king’s daughter-in-law, governed the villages of Tskhratskaro and Beselta. She addressed the Ossetians of Tskhratskaro and Beselta, emphasizing their longstanding allegiance and obligation to the crown: “You know very well that you have been our servants for so long, and you serve us, and now our men will be arriving shortly to collect my gifts and duties” ([Korneli Kekelidze National Centre of Manuscripts Hd-1497, 1802, 26. XII](#)).

The integration of Ossetians into feudal ownership within the Kartli kingdom was contin-

1 Rukhula, Rekhula – the Lekhura river, left tributary of Mtkvari. It originates in the southern part of the Kharuli ridge.

2 Ketevan, the King’s daughter-in-law (1746-1808), widow of King Erekle’s son, Vakhtang (Good) Batonishvili, daughter of Konstantine Mukhran-Batoni.

gent upon royal approval. Evidently, migrant Ossetians who settled within the domain of a specific prince were subject to his jurisdiction.

Following the establishment of the Kizilbash rule in Kartli, on August 1, 1737, Safi Khan¹ entrusted the Ossetians of the Java Valley to Otar Amilakhvari, mandating a census of the newly settled families ([Korneli Kekelidze National Centre of Manuscripts Hd-393, 1737. 1. VIII](#)). Similarly, Ossetians residing in the Isroli Gorge were assigned by King Erekle to Shalva Eristavi ([Korneli Kekelidze National Centre of Manuscripts Hd-1052, 1774, 14. XII](#)). In 1749, Erekle II dispatched the village constable Orbeliani to the villages of the Java Valley – Gupta, Koda, and Koshki Chala – and consigned the Ossetians dwelling there to Baadur Machabeli, who assumed responsibility for overseeing the villages and their vassals ([Korneli Kekelidze National Centre of Manuscripts Qd-9205 a](#)).

In 1765, Zaza Machabeli petitioned King Erekle, requesting, “Since the Ossetians are to be settled in Kartli by your decree, may it be your benevolence to leave my estate alone so that I may settle there whom I want to” ([Korneli Kekelidze National Centre of Manuscripts Qd-8703](#)). An inscription is attached to this document, in which King Erekle accedes to Zaza Machabeli’s appeal, a decision authenticated by his seal.

As previously mentioned, the integration of vassals and peasants into the feudal hierarchy of Shida Kartli often occurred through the settlement of Ossetians, a process keenly facilitated by local feudal lords seeking to bolster their estates. Documentation concerning the Saeristavo estates in Ksani reveals instances where Shanshe Eristavi (1718–1753) undertook the settlement of Ossetians on his lands, establishing a village that endured for eighty years, while Davit Eristavi (1753–1774) similarly engaged in the clearance of forests four decades prior, erecting another village and accommodating Ossetian settlers ([Korneli Kekelidze National Centre of Manuscripts Qd-8820, first quarter of the nineteenth century; Qd-8864, first half of the nineteenth century](#)).

However, the aspirations of the Ksani nobility regarding Ossetian settlers were not entirely realized. Tornike Eristavi of Ksani voiced grievances to the representative Besarion Saginov (in the original language), asserting demands for payment from the Ossetians inhabiting Dzeglevi for their use of his estate ([Korneli Kekelidze National Centre of Manuscripts Qd-8902, 1843, 12. II](#)). In another document, Tornike Eristavi expressed discontent regarding Ossetian vassals, addressing Ioane Avalov to assert that the Ossetians residing in the Khopi and Dzeglevi estates were remiss in tax payments, prompting his request for their expulsion ([Korneli Kekelidze National Centre of Manuscripts Qd-8903, first half of the nineteenth century](#)). This sentiment persisted, as evidenced by Tornike Eristavi’s subsequent appeal to Ioane Avalov in 1844, reiterating the plea for tax collection and the subsequent eviction of Ossetians from his estates ([Korneli Kekelidze National Centre of Manuscripts Qd-8919](#)).

In some cases, Ossetians engaged in raiding activities were compelled to enter serfdom

1 Safi Khan, also known as “Khanjal Khan,” was a Persianized Georgian noble from the Orbelishvili family. He participated in the Mughan assembly, where he participated in the proclamation of Nadir Khan as Shah. From 1735 to 1737, he effectively assumed control over the governance of Kartli and Kakheti.

under Georgian feudal lords. Notably, Chibirashvili Choba and his sibling Apha engaged in a hostile pursuit of Georgians”. Their actions included multiple assaults on the men of Giorgi Palavandishvili. During one such encounter, they caught Paata from Atotsi and killed Bidzina Abramishvili; on another occasion, their victim was an attendant accompanying Palavandishvili. Subsequently, Palavandishvili captured them, demanding retribution for the bloodshed. In an attempt to settle the matter, they sacrificed four bulls for the deceased’s “inheritance and burial”. However, the sum demanded as blood price exceeded their means, leading them to offer themselves as serfs, signifying their acknowledgment of responsibility: “I, Choba, along with my wife, my brother Apha, and my mother, hereby pledge ourselves for the blood debt” ([Korneli Kekelidze National Centre of Manuscripts Hd-647, 1783. 10. XI](#)).

The settlement of Ossetians in certain regions led to a decline in the local population due to frequent attacks on villages and the looting of people. This situation prompted the royal authorities to intervene to restore order. On May 2, 1771, King Erekle issued a specific directive to Giorgi Kularaghas¹ regarding the Ossetian issue: “You are familiar with our Ossetians. Those from Vanati are particularly troublesome, and we have witnessed many undesirable actions from them. Currently, due to food shortages, they are venturing into the lowlands. Apprehend any of them you encounter”. This document is significant because it illuminates the geographic distribution of Ossetians. It explicitly states that Ossetians reside in the mountains and, due to food scarcity, resort to raiding lowland areas.

Instances of Ossetian robbery and theft are documented in various historical records. In 1788, Giorgi Batonishvili issued a special order to Bardzim and Zaza Machabeli to return the bulls stolen by Ossetian vassals to Petre Avalishvili: “Your Ossetians will not be able to help you. Return the bulls to settle the case” ([Korneli Kekelidze National Centre of Manuscripts Qd-8691](#)). In 1798, during his reign, King Giorgi XII issued an order to the Machabeli, Ioane of Regional governor of Tskhinvali, and the residents of Tskhinvali concerning the robbery of two Jews and the Kereselidzes due to Ossetian incursions into Achabeti and Tskhinvali: “Did you do anything? This is bad for the country, and we are very upset” ([Korneli Kekelidze National Centre of Manuscripts Qd-8685](#)).

The Machabeli made concerted efforts to curb the lawlessness of the Ossetians. In 1806, the serfs of Luarsab Machabeli and his uncle Zaza, along with the Ossetians of the Java Valley and the Tchvirivi Gorge, provided hostages as a guarantee against further kidnappings ([Korneli Kekelidze National Centre of Manuscripts, Qd-9062](#)). Concurrently, the inhabitants of the Great Liakhvi gorge pledged not to shelter perpetrators of violence and

¹ Giorgi Kularaghas, Giorgi Eristavi of Ksani – Eristavi (Pribnce) of Ksani from 1774 to 1777, Kularaghas. He frequently defied King Erekle II and, with a hired band of Lezghins, raided villages in Kartli. He was married to the daughter of Erekle II. In 1777, he rebelled, and when Erekle II sent envoys for reconciliation, Eristavi of Ksani refused to submit. Consequently, the king sent an army led by Giorgi and Levan Batonishvili against him. The army captured the fortresses of the principality, apprehended the lord, and brought him to Tbilisi in December 1777. Erekle II spared the life of Giorgi Eristavi of Ksani but abolished the principality, declared a large portion as a domain, and transferred it to Giorgi and Iulon Batonishvili. The children of the Eristavi were left with a small estate in Gverdisdziri.

theft, nor to engage in trade with them, reinforcing their oath by providing hostages ([Korneli Kekelidze National Centre of Manuscripts Qd-9036](#)).

Royal authorities endeavored to mediate disputes involving Ossetian offenders and ensured sustenance for the detained hostages, as evidenced by various documents. For instance, “correspondence from official Ioane to Tumanian in 1790 about the provision of flour to Ossetian hostages” ([Korneli Kekelidze National Centre of Manuscripts Hd-13256, 1790. 4. VI](#)). Similarly, “correspondence to prefect Bardzim about provision of meat, bread, and wine to the Ossetian hostage in Khishi” ([Korneli Kekelidze National Centre of Manuscripts Hd-12720, 1791. 5. VI](#)). Furthermore, “correspondence to prefect Bardzim about provision of wine to the Ossetian hostages in Java” ([Korneli Kekelidze National Centre of Manuscripts Hd-13206, 1791. 5. VI](#)).

The royal administration endeavored to foster reconciliation between the Georgians and the Ossetians by facilitating a pledge of mutual assistance and collaboration. A document dating back to 1796 illustrates this effort, stating: “We, Vanati Ossetians and Georgians, have compiled this oath, promise, and a fine book, and exchanged it with each other...” The Ossetians residing in Vanati have caused significant disturbance through acts of theft, violence, extortion, and harassment. Hence, the commitment is made to support each other until the end of our days, emphasizing that if any Georgian encounters an issue with an Ossetian or vice versa, it would constitute a sin against God, our master, and ourselves ([Korneli Kekelidze National Centre of Manuscripts Hd-664, 1796 7. IV](#)). Iulon Batonishvili’s protocol complements this document.

Their religious beliefs posed obstacles to their integration into the Christian social and legal order of the Georgian kingdoms. They were pagans. Christian church laws prohibited marriage with pagans. Since the issue of marriage and divorce was a matter of church legislation, the Catholicos-Patriarch had the prerogative of control over it. In a document from 1750, Anton Catholicos specifically appeals to Baadur Machabeli to prevent the marriage of the Christian daughter of Farsadana Nabichvrishvili to a pagan Ossetian ([Korneli Kekelidze National Centre of Manuscripts Qd-8706](#)). The Catholicos demands that the woman be taken away and married to David uriapavil. It seems that the Jewish David converted to Christianity, which is why he is called Uriapavil. Marriage between Georgians and Ossetians is discussed in the 1782 document “Decree on the Plain and Mountainous Places”, which is addressed to the residents of the Aragvi Saeristavo and directly states that if a Christian marries an Ossetian, it will be considered a crime and he will be held accountable, and if he marries an Ossetian woman, he must be baptized ([Korneli Kekelidze National Centre of Manuscripts Sd-493; Togoshvili, 1969, p. 205](#)).

The Christianization of Ossetians was made a state policy by the Russian Empire, which had established itself in Georgia and the Caucasus in the 19th century. Before that, the revival of Russian-Georgian relations in the 18th century made the Tergi Gorge route relevant. Political-diplomatic and military missions passed through the Dariali Gorge; trade and caravan traffic were also resumed. This route was called the “Ossetian Road” or the “Caravan Road through Ossetia,” and King Erekle II entrusted the guardian of Stepants-

minda, Gabriel Kazibegishvili.¹, with supervision over it and relations with the Ossetians of Tagauri. In a letter sent by Gabriel to the king in 1789, it is noted that the Ossetians of Tagauri did not allow caravans to pass through the Tergi Gorge ([Korneli Kekelidze National Centre of Manuscripts Hd-4021, 1789. 7. I](#)). The document also indicates that King Erekle possessed judicial authority over the Ossetians of Tagauri.

In isolated cases, Ossetians also appear in 18th-century statistical lists. The “List of Men Deported from Krtskhinvali” dates back to the first half of the 18th century ([Korneli Kekelidze National Centre of Manuscripts Hd-14876](#)). The document is damaged. It lists 17 families displaced from Tskhinvali, and indicates where they are. For example: “Khakhana’s son Gigina is in Samachablo”, “Estate Makara’s son is in Ossetia”; “Petre Khabareli is in Ossetia”, “Khasovani are in Ossetia”. The fact that peasants displaced from Tskhinvali are mentioned among those displaced to Ossetia clearly indicates that Ossetians did not yet live in the city of Tskhinvali.

The “List of Uncollected Begara in the Mgviri Gorge” dates back to the end of the 18th century ([Korneli Kekelidze National Centre of Manuscripts Hd-5888; History, 1962, 211, doc. 178](#)). It lists the villages of the Mgviri Gorge: Sheliuri, Maraleti, Klartsvi, Geri, Tsiari, Chvrivi.² Peasants performing forced labor are referred to by their surnames. They are ethnically mainly Georgians, and Ossetians are also named. For example, Badri Kulunbegashvili, a resident of Klartsvi, who seems to have already been Georgianized, since his surname has a Georgian form and is integrated into the Georgian feudal space, with taxes imposed on him.

One of the obligations of feudal service was military service. After Erekle II created the regular army, lists of people to be drafted were drawn up. One of them is the “List of the Schedule for Drafting from the Villages of Zemo Kartli in April”, in which, along with other villages of Shida Kartli, men to be drafted into the army from Tskhinvali are named ([Korneli Kekelidze National Centre of Manuscripts Hd-11644, 1774-1800](#)). The absolute majority of them are Georgian. These are the serfs of the Machabeli, Kherkheulidze, Tsitsishvili, Orjonikidze, and Baadurishvili families. The Ossetian Dokhchikoshvili Tiko is also mentioned there, as is the Echmiadzin serf Fil Buzashvili Papa.

1 Gabriel Kazibegishvili, the eldest son of Dimitri (Kazibeg) Chopikashvili. After his father’s death, he was appointed as the guardian of Stepantsminda. His guardianship included the Dariali Gorge, which he was responsible for protecting and guarding. From the end of the 18th century, he was called not Chopikashvili, but Kazibegishvili. It was from this time that Stepantsminda and Mkinvartsveri were called Kazbegi in Russian sources of that time, because Gabriel already had a new surname. He was in close relations with King Erekle and his family. He was distinguished by his loyalty to Erekle II. After the signing of the Treaty of Georgievsky, he pursued a policy of strengthening the alliance with Russia and actively assisted the Russian army advancing towards Tbilisi through the Dariali Gorge. In 1813, the Russian government awarded him the rank of Major General. He died in 1817 ([Shaduri, 1985, pp. 19-27](#)).

2 Mgviri, Ghvria – a ravine and community in the Patara Liakhvi Gorge, also known as Geri Gorge. The Mgviri Gorge included the villages of Ghvria, Geri, Gudisi, Klartsvi, Maraleti, Mipareti, Saboloke, Sheleuri, Tsira, Chvrivi ([Makalatia, 1971, p. 59-60; Sosiashvili, 2022, p. 16](#)).

CONCLUSION

According to documentary sources, Ossetian migration to the territory of present-day Georgia began at the beginning of the 17th century and became active in the second half of the 18th century. The Ossetians, to seize booty, mainly attacked the Kingdom of Kartli. They were conquering territories in the headwaters of the Great Liakhvi. The royal authorities and the nobility attempted to incorporate the settled Ossetians into feudal relations. This would neutralize the threat of their attacks and, at the same time, increase the number of serfs and peasants, thereby increasing state revenues. The kings of Kartli and local feudal lords created appropriate conditions for Ossetians to settle on the land. The majority of Ossetians sought to become the king's personal serfs.

The mountain noble society found it difficult to adapt to the feudal system. Documentary sources indicate they did not pay taxes and refused to fulfill their feudal obligations. The settled Ossetians attacked and robbed the local population, which became so widespread that the forces of the local feudal lords were not enough, and the royal government intervened to restore order.

The royal government tried to reconcile the Ossetian criminals, demanding hostages from them as a guarantee of peace and providing for the Ossetian hostages themselves. In addition, the royal government attempted to reconcile the Georgians and Ossetians, requiring them to promise non-interference and mutual assistance.

Documentary sources portray Ossetian migration in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as frequently accompanied by armed incursions and aggressive actions, and, despite the efforts of the royal court, full integration into the Georgian feudal space remained limited.

Ethics Approval and Conflict of Interest

This study was conducted in accordance with relevant ethical standards. The authors declare that there are no financial, personal, professional, or institutional conflicts of interest that could have influenced the design, conduct, interpretation, or publication of this work.

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Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have influenced the work reported in this paper.

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