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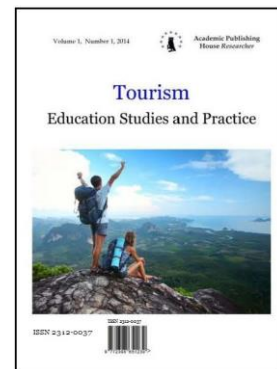
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Svaneti – Ancient Historical and Geographical Province

Nana M. Berdzenishvili ^{a, *}, Besarion Beridzishvili ^a

^a Iakob Gogebashvili Telavi State University, Georgia

Abstract

Svaneti – is a mountainous region, falling to the west. Ushguli village is approximately 2100 meters above the sea level, the district center Mestia is at a height of 1400 meters from the sea, the Enguri, on the border of Eastern and Western Svaneti – 1200 meters, the merger Was and Inguri – 900 meters, the village Khaishi – a total of 600. Historically, the Upper Svaneti is divided into East and West, in other words on the Free and Princely. At the time, the princes of Dadshkeliani could subdue the Western Svan communities to the river of Darla, but has not progressed further, and Darla became the border between the two Svaneti. In turn, the Dadiani princes conquered Lower Svaneti, but was not able to pass the pass the Sun, which became the boundary between the Lower and Upper Svaneti. As a result, the Eastern (Freestyle) Svaneti reached our time in a more archaic state, with a more traditional way of life and with a large number of stone buildings, which include temples and Svan towers. Here there are the most interesting objects and tourists concentrate their attention on this Svaneti.

Keywords: Svaneti, Mestia historical-geographical region, Georgia, Caucasus mountains.

Introduction

Svaneti or Svanetia (Suania in ancient sources) (Georgian: სვანეთი *Svaneti*) is a historic province in Georgia, in the northwestern part of the country. It is inhabited by the Svans, an ethnic subgroup of Georgians.

Situated on the southern slopes of the central Caucasus Mountains and surrounded by 3,000–5,000 meter peaks, Svaneti is the highest inhabited area in the Caucasus. Four of the 10 highest peaks of the Caucasus are located in the region. The highest mountain in Georgia, Mount Shkhara at 5,201 meters (17,059 feet), is located in the province. Prominent peaks include Tetnuldi (4,974 m / 16,319 ft), Shota Rustaveli (4,960 m / 16,273 ft), Mount Ushba (4,710 m / 15,453 ft), Ailama (4,525 m / 14,842 ft), as well as Lalveri, Latsga and others.

* Corresponding author

E-mail addresses: nanaka.berdzenishvili@yahoo.com (N.M. Berdzenishvili),
besaberi@yahoo.com (B. Beridzishvili)

Materials and methods

The actual materials were used: climate directories, databases of the National Agency and the Hydrometeorological Institute, "Atlas of Georgia" in 2009, all existing to date literary sources concerning the situation, topography, climate, cities of Georgia (Berdzenishvili, 2016; Katamadze, Katamadze, 2013; Kvaratskhelia, 2009; Elizbarashvili, 2007; Samukashvili, 2001; Kordzakhia, 2007). The work used GIS research methods and methods of mathematical statistics, Historical records, historical maps.

Discussion

Svaneti has two parts corresponding to two inhabited valleys:

- **Upper Svaneti** (*Zemo Svaneti*) on the upper Inguri River; administratively part of Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti; main town Mestia
- **Lower Svaneti** (*Kvemo Svaneti*) on the upper Tskhenistsqali River; administratively part of Racha-Lechkhumi and Kvemo Svaneti; main town Lentekhi

They are separated by the Svaneti Range which is almost as high as the main Caucasus range. Historical Svaneti also included the Kodori Gorge in the adjoining rebel province of Abkhazia, and part of the adjacent river valleys of Kuban and Baksan north of the crest of the Caucasus. Writing in 1848, Bodenstedt said that Upper Svaneti could only be reached by a difficult footpath which was closed in winter

The landscape of Svaneti is dominated by mountains that are separated by deep gorges. Most of the region which lies below 1,800 meters (5,904 ft) above sea level is covered by mixed and coniferous forests. The forest zone is made up of tree species such as spruce, fir, beech, oak, and hornbeam. Other species that are less common but may still be found in some areas include chestnut, birch, maple, pine and box. The zone which extends from 1,800 meters to roughly about 3,000 meters (5,904–9,840 ft) above sea level consists of alpine meadows and grasslands. Eternal snows and glaciers take over in areas that are over 3,000 meters above sea level. The region is notable for its glaciers and picturesque summits. Svaneti's signature peak is probably Mount Ushba which towers over the Inguri Gorge and can be seen from many parts of the region.

The climate of Svaneti is humid and is influenced by the air masses coming in from the Black Sea throughout the year. Average temperatures and precipitation vary considerably with elevation. Annual precipitation ranges between 1000 and 3200 mm (39 and 126 inches). The highest amount of precipitation falls on the Greater Caucasus Mountains. The region is characterized by very heavy snowfall in the winter and avalanches are a frequent occurrence. Snow cover may reach 5 meters (16.4 feet) in some areas. In general, the lowest regions of Svaneti (800–1200 meters / 2624–3936 feet above sea level) are characterized by long, warm summers and relatively cold and snowy winters. Middle altitudes (1200–1800 meters above sea level) experience relatively warm summers and cold winters. Areas above 2000 meters above sea level lie within a zone that experiences short, cool summers (less than 3 months) and long and cold winters. Large parts of Svaneti lie above 3000 meters (9840 feet) above sea level, a zone which does not have a real summer. Due to Svaneti's close proximity to the Black Sea, the region is spared from the extremely cold winter temperatures that are characteristic of high mountains.

The Svans are usually identified with the *Soanes* mentioned by Greek geographer Strabo, who placed them more or less in the area still occupied by the modern-day Svans. The province had been a dependency of Colchis, and of its successor kingdom of Lazica (Egrisi) until AD 552, when the Svans took advantage of the Lazic War, repudiated this connection and went over to the Persians. The Byzantines wanted the region, for if they secured its passes, they could prevent Persian raids on the border areas of Lazica. With the end of the war (562), Svanetia again became part of Lazica. Then, the province joined the Kingdom of Abkhazia to form a unified monarchy which was incorporated into the Kingdom of Georgia in the early 11th century. Svanetia became a duchy (*saeristavo*) within it, governed by a duke (*eristavi*). The province's Orthodox culture flourished particularly during the Georgian "golden age" under Queen Tamar (r. 1184-1213), who was respected almost as goddess by the Svanetians. The legend has it that the duchy was annually visited by Tamar. The Svans had been known as fierce warriors for centuries. Their inflatable war banner was named *Lemi* (Lion) because of its shape.

The marauding Mongols never reached Svanetia and, for a time, the region became a cultural safe house. Following the final disintegration of the Kingdom of Georgia in the 1460s, fighting broke out for controlling the province. Part of Upper Svanetia formed an independent principality under the Princes Dadashkeliani, a branch of the Gelovani family, while Lower Svanetia, originally ruled by the Princes Gelovani, was temporarily usurped and subdued by the Mingrelian princes Dadiani.

While the Svanetian population resisted the unpleasant conditions of the high mountain environment they lived in for centuries, the increasing economic difficulties of the last two decades and frequent natural disasters — floods and landslides as of April 2005 have brought about a strong tendency towards migration. The province became a safe haven for criminals threatening local residents and tourists. Large-scale anti-criminal operations carried out by the Georgian Special Forces as of March 2004 resulted in significant improvement of the situation.

The Svans, the indigenous population of Svanetia, are ethnic subgroup of the Georgians. Until the 1930s, Mingrelians and Svans had their own census grouping, but were classified under the broader category of Georgian thereafter. They are Georgian Orthodox Christians, and were Christianized in the 4th-6th centuries. However, some remnants of old paganism have been maintained. Saint George (known as *Jgëræg* to the locals), a patron saint of Georgia, is the most respected saint. The Svans have retained many of their old traditions, including blood revenge. Their families are small, and the husband is the head of his family. The Svan really respect the older women in families.

Typically bilingual, they use both Georgian and their own, unwritten Svan language, which together with the Georgian, Mingrelian, and Laz languages constitute the South Caucasian or Kartvelian language family. The Svan language is endangered and is being largely replaced by Georgian.

Svanetia is known for their architectural treasures and picturesque landscapes. The botany of Svanetia is legendary among travelers. The famous Svanetian towers erected mainly in the 9th-12th centuries, make the region's villages more attractive. In the province are dozens of Georgian orthodox churches and various fortified buildings. Architectural monuments of Upper Svanetia are included in a list of UNESCO World Heritage Sites.

Svan culture survives most wonderfully in its songs and dances. Svanetia boasts arguably the most archaic three-part polyphonic singing. Most of their songs are connected to round dances, are performed very loud and are full of dissonant chords.

Preserved by its long-lasting geographical isolation, the mountain landscape of the Upper Svaneti region is an exceptional example of mountain scenery with medieval villages and tower houses.

The property occupies the upper reaches of the Inguri River Basin between the Caucasus and Svaneti ranges. It consists of several small villages forming a community that are dominated by the towers and situated on the mountain slopes, with a natural environment of gorges and alpine valleys and a backdrop of snow-covered mountains. The most notable feature of the settlements is the abundance of towers.

The village of Chazhashi in Ushguli community, situated at the confluence of the Inguri and Black Rivers, has preserved more than 200 medieval tower houses, churches and castles. The land use and settlement structure reveal the continued dwelling and building traditions of local Svan people living in harmony with the surrounding natural environment. The origins of Svaneti tower houses go back to prehistory. Its features reflect the traditional economic mode and social organization of Svan communities. These towers usually have three to five floors, and the thickness of the walls decreases, giving the towers a slender, tapering profile. The houses themselves are usually two-storeyed; the ground floor is a single hall with an open hearth and accommodation for both people and domestic animals, the latter being separated by a wooden partition, which is often lavishly decorated. A corridor annex helped the thermal insulation of the building. The upper floor was used by the human occupants during summer, and also served as a store for fodder and tools. A door at this level provided access to the tower, which was also connected with the corridor that protected the entrance. The houses were used both as dwellings and as defence posts against the invaders who plagued the region.

The property is also notable for the monumental and minor arts. The mural paintings are outstanding examples of Renaissance painting in Georgia.

Ushguli is a community of four villages located at the head of the Enguri gorge in Svaneti, Georgia. Ushguli is part of the Upper Svaneti UNESCO World Heritage Site, and is considered to be the highest continuously inhabited settlement in Europe.

Weather: 50°F (10°C), Wind S at 7 mph (11 km/h), 86 % Humidity

UNESCO World Heritage Site inscription: 1996

The peaks of the Caucasus Mountains dwarf the crumbling defensive towers that are doing their best to reach up to the sky. High above the rest of Europe, for those who still include Georgia as its final frontier, the village of Ushguli is the continent's highest continually inhabited settlement.

Ushguli is also unusual in that it's not a singular village, but rather four small communities clustered together in a remote part of northern Georgia. This region of Svaneti is a land wrapped in myth. It was once the supposed home of the Golden Fleece, where sheepskin hides were used in panning for gold in the mountain rivers, and Svaneti also made up the northern fringes of the ancient kingdom of Colchis. In more recent history, Svaneti was known for its bandits, Medieval defensive towers and local tribes with their own culture and the Svan language.

Since the new road opened, connecting the rest of Georgia to Mestia, the main town in Svaneti, the region has started to modernise at a drastic rate. Mestia has already embarked on its aggressive mission to become the Swiss resort of the Caucasus, and while the old part of the town retains its unique character dotted with signature Svan towers, the rest of the town has been transformed into a chic European style ski resort.

Mount Ushba – one of the highest mountains in this part of the Caucasus Mountains.

Ushguli on the other hand provides an old world contrast, since it is protected by its position deep the mountains and is at the end of a bad road only accessible by a vehicle with a four wheel drive. However, it is only a matter of time till the modern world catches up with it.

Conclusion

At first the dilapidation is a bit of a shock. Parts of the village are abandoned, with towers that have partly collapsed or emptied buildings, scattered in clusters between the craggy mountains and rolling green hills and wild woodlands. The first communities we passed on the road from Mestia, Murqmeli and Chazhashi, are the most run down, but crossing the river, headed up by a glacier that's 8 km away, the livelier hamlets of Chvibiani and Zhibiani are where we found the core of Ushguli's life. There are 70 families in Ushguli and one small school in Ushguli. Despite its location of being 2200 m above sea level, and being in a region that can often get cut off from the world in the winter, it is a community that is continually inhabited. Svaneti is the most beautiful of the historical and geographic province.

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UDC 33

Сванетия – древняя историческая и географическая областьНана М. Бердзенишвили^{а, *}, Весарион Беридзешвили^а^а Телавский государственный университет, Грузия

Аннотация. Сванетия – высокогорный район, понижающийся к западу. Село Ушгули - примерно 2100 метров от уровня моря, райцентр Местиа – на высоте 1400 метров от моря, Ингури на границе Восточной и Западной Сванети – 1200 метров, слияние Накры и Ингури – 900 метров, поселок Хаиши – всего 600. Исторически Верхняя Сванетия делится на Восточную и Западную, в других формулировках – на Вольную и Княжескую. В свое время князя Дадешкелиани сумели подчинить западные сванские общины до реки Дорла, но дальше не продвинулись, и Дорла стала границей двух Сванетий. В свою очередь князя Дадиани подчинили Нижнюю Сванети, но не смогли пройти за перевал Загар, который и стал границей между Нижней и Верхней Сванетией. В результате Восточная (Вольная) Сванети дошла до нашего времени в более архаичном состоянии, с более традиционным укладом жизни и с большим количеством каменных сооружений, к которым относятся храмы и сванские башни. Здесь больше всего интересных объектов и туристы концентрируют свое внимание именно на этой Сванетии.

Ключевые слова: Сванетия, Местиа, историко-географической провинции, Грузия, Кавказские горы.

* Корреспондирующий автор

Адреса электронной почты: nanaka.berdzenishvili@yahoo.com (Н.М. Бердзенишвили),
besaberi@yahoo.com (В. Беридзешвили)