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Migrants living in Kvemo Kartli”

Sacral Space Construing Examples Among Highland Migrants of Georgia

The present work discusses the field ethnographic material obtained among the population, which due to
ecological factors migrated from the highland region of Georgia – Svaneti and Adjara to the lowlands.
Research aims to answer the following research question: what influence the migration processes and
migrants’ psychological-mental connection with their former place of residence has on the sacral space
formation in their new settlement areas? Research methods: Observation, interviews, method of close
description, historical-comparative method and method of visual anthropology.

Any element of the traditional life and culture is being established in conditions adjusted to concrete
residential environment. The life of highlands and lowlands is also different. The population that migrated
from the highland region to lowland (Kvemo Kartli) found quite a new residential environment, which along
with sharply differentiated geographical location, differed with the ethnic variety of the population. The
migrated population gradually became a member of a new multi-ethnic society, though they have not broken
their psychological connection with their former dwelling place – mountains. The population build mainly
common shrine, which bears the name of the church that was considered to be the strongest among the other
shrines of their former settlements. But these new build sacral centers cannot replaced older ones. In
subconscious of the population the main place is occupied by the place of their former settlement and sacral
centers connected with it, but in their new settlement areas migrants also have newly organized sacred space.

**Keywords:** Eco-migrants, Connection, Sacral, Shrines, Transformation.

**Introduction**

Processes of migration are of great importance in the history of Georgia. They were caused by different reasons. Important internal migration processes started in the end of the second half of XX century and were provoked by the ecological factors. In result, an important part of the population of Georgia from the highlands migrated to the lowlands. The movement of people as a result of changes in the environment especially from mountainous areas is not a new phenomenon. In this article, we will represent ethnographic materials gathered among highlander migrants from mountainous Svaneti and Adjara region of Georgia living in different villages and cities of Kvemo Kartli region. There are fixed several interesting facts which show how highlander migrants construing sacred spaces in their new settlement areas.

The reason of migration from highland to the lowlands was not only ecological disasters. According to the ethnographic materials gathered among migrated population settled in different places of Kvemo Kartli region faced serious problem in highland places connected with the lack of arable lands. As a result, highlanders migrated also from those villages of Svaneti and Adjara that did not experience the natural disasters. However, migrants are mostly mentioned with the status of eco-migrants. The state was interested in settling the eco-migrants in that part of the lowland of Georgia, where the Georgian population was in ethnic minority. One of such main centers was Kvemo (Lower) Kartli, where numerous compact settlements appeared. Refugee Svans from Abkhazia and Kodori Gorge also settled in places designated for eco-migrant Svans and Adjarians.

**Methodology**

The research is based on ethnographic materials gathered among eco-migrants living in different areas of Kvemo Kartli region of Georgia. Directly in the field work the method of important and universal research for apprehension and fixation of the primary ethnographic material is the method of observation. The method enables the researcher to fix those events and facts, a direct witness of which the researcher becomes. In its turn, the method of observation differs according to the form of organization, the researcher’s involvement, the form of relation, frequency and duration. The method of observation we used for study of the research issue implies non-formalized, open and according to the researcher’s involvement – participant observation. Observation essentially means deliberate watch of the events, their correct apprehension and fixation. In the period of field work
we compiled a field-ethnographic diary. The method of observation is of essential importance for our research, because the observer is in more natural situation than the person conducting the tests. Natural and direct condition was necessary for our research topic and in some cases it is even a decisive factor. At the same time, directness is an indicator of reliability of empiric research. Along with the method of observation, for determination of importance of gathering the primary ethnographic material, was used the method of questioning. From two forms of questioning – interview and questionnaire, our priority was the method of interview, because the method of questionnaire is of comparatively formalized character and leaves less space for free questions. For analysis of socio-historical data and explanation of separate phenomena, of great importance is also the method of close description and visual anthropology, which enabled us to show the written material obtained in the field visually – by photos and video material.

Ethno-demographic and Cultural tendencies in Kvemo Kartli Region

Numerous part of migrants settled in Kvemo Kartli region which is one of the territories of Georgia where demographic picture was always changing depending on historical events. Historically and today also, along with the Georgia population, the representatives of the non-Georgian ethnic groups lived and live in Kvemo Kartli. Frequent migration of Armenians and Azerbajianis generally into Georgia, and namely in Kvemo Kartli was caused by their living in the areas bordering Georgia. In the Middle Ages Armenia was often raided from the South and in result a great part of its population migrated to the territory of Georgia. Within XIX-XX centuries Armenians were one of the most plentiful among foreign ethnic entities in Georgia. They lived in compact settlements in Samtskhe-Javakheti, Kvemo Kartli and Trialeti provinces of Georgia. Migrant Armenians used to leave directly to Georgia. Mixed population was nearly always in the borderline area (თოფჩიშვილი, 2015, გვ. 185). It is known that in V century church services in the borderline zone were conducted in Georgian and Armenian as well (მაისურაძე, 1999, გვ. 21). The colophon of one Armenian manuscript of 1459 clarifies that a certain part of Armenians settled in the village of Kiketi, the Algeti Gorge. One interesting demographic list of 1770 proves existence of compact groups of Turkmen tribes and Armenian population (ბერძენიშვილი, 1979, გვ. 11). The then authorities of the country also promoted settlement of Armenians in Georgia, due to hard social-economic condition. Owing to external factors, in some provinces of Georgia the population was destroyed or was considerably reduced in number; to this were added raids of Lezghins (Daghestanians’ raids), in result of which the population in remote part of Kvemo Kartli became smaller in number. However, the country needed the population, as major production force. Armenians settled in Kvemo Kartli in the last period of reign of King Erekle II as well. “In the end of XVIII century King Erekle II gave a permit to three Armenian meliqs from Karabakh to settle in Kvemo Kartli together with their serfs. A large number of Armenians settled in the territory of the present-day Bolnisi, Tetritskaro and Marneuli regions in the same period (ჯაოშვილი, 1984, გვ. 185).
Relation with the Georgian ethnic environment was reflected in almost all the spheres of traditional life and culture of Armenians living in Georgia. Influence of the Georgian construction traditions is felt in XIX century houses and agricultural facilities of Armenians living in the rural areas. To get used to new ecosystem, Armenians living in Georgia mastered work tools optimally adjusted to the local natural-geographical environment (ჯანიაშვილი, 2008, გვ. 103).

Azerbaijanis are majority in number among the foreign ethnic unites in Georgia. Under Soviet Union rule, Azerbaijanis constituted the third largest ethnic unit in the country (after Armenians and Russians), but their numbers grew constantly due to a high birth rate, as well as low rate of migration. Consequently the numbers of Azerbaijanis rose to make them Georgia’s largest ethnic unit by 2002. According to the population census of 2002, there are 284,761 ethnic Azerbaijanis living in Georgia, and 1,641 Azerbaijanis living in Tetritskaro district of Georgia. Azerbaijanis who are Turkish-speaking people, were named in historic materials as “Elis” and later also called –“Tatar” (თოფჩიშვილი, 2015, გვ. 192). Almost all ancestors of Azerbaijanis living in Georgia came from Persia in late middle ages. According to Vakhushhi Batonishvili, in the second quarter of XVII century Shah-Sepi, ruler of Iran, settled Muslim Elis in the middle part of Ktsia (ვახუშტი, 1941, გვ. 45). From there they came to Kvemo Kartli, Algeti Gorge in XVIII century and founded the following villages: Sarvani, Amirkhasalu, Kapanakchi and Kosalo (ბერძენიშვილი, 1979, გვ. 106). It should be mentioned that Azerbaijanis living in Georgia have succeeded in preserving their ethnic identity, native language and folklore as well as their beliefs, rites and rituals. Most Azerbaijanis in Georgia speak their native language as a first language. Azerbaijanis who live in Tbilisi (capital city of Georgia) are mainly bilingual or trilingual, along their native language speak the state language – Georgian, and often they know Russian as well. On the other hand, Azerbaijanis living in compact villages in Kvemo Kartli, mostly do not know the state language. In this case language remains as a major matter of social integration with other inhabitants. At present Azerbaijanis live in several villages of Tetritskaro: Shikhilo, Kosalar, Naplnari and some families also live directly in the city of Tetritskaro. The largest among the villages listed above is Kosalar, ethnic composition of which is fully Azerbaijani and involves about 500 families. In the village school study is entirely in the Azerbaijani language, so the younger generation cannot speak the state language – Georgian. As for another Azerbaijani village Shikhilo, its population is comparatively smaller in number and consists of about 20-25 families. Population of this village go to school to a neighboring village – Samghereti, where the Georgian Muslims, migrated from the highland AdJara, co-live with Azerbaijanis and Armenians. Here teaching at school is in Georgian, respectively, young Azerbaijanis and Armenians from this village along with their native language speak the state language – Georgian.

Before the appearance of highlander eco-migrants there also lived Turkish spoken Greek population came from northeast part of Turkey after the Russian-Turkish war in 1928-1829 years. The main reason of migration is named to be the persecution of Christianity. As it is mentioned in
sciences, literature, Turkish spoken Greek migrants were choosing abandoned Georgian villages. They used old farm buildings and houses. Migrants had changed the toponyms of old Georgian villages and introduced new ones from their former place of residence. Village Tsalka (formerly known as Trialeti) was called “Guniakala”, Kvemo Akhalsheni called “Kiraki”, Zemo Akhalsheni – Bashkoy etc. (Songulashvili 2004)

Examples of organizing sacral spaces among Svan and Adjarian migrants

In Kvemo (Lower) Kartli eco-migrants from Adjara and Svaneti co-live with the multiethnic community of the region. Residential environment the eco-migrants met there is different from the traditions, ethnographic environment, which they lived in. It is known that any elements of traditional life were established for centuries in different ethnographic region of Georgia in compliance with the geographic environment. Everyday life in highlands and lowlands was diverse. Eco-migrants in Kvemo Kartli faced new geographic, ethnic and socio-cultural environment in which various ethnic unities co-lived. Naturally, the new geographic, ethnic and socio-cultural environment was followed by a number of changes in the traditional life of both migrants and hosts. This, in its turn, became a reason for disappearance of numerous cultural elements and their transformation.

New settlement area Kvemo Kartli region became an interesting example of multi-ethnic and multicultural and religious coexistence. Eco-migrants coming to this area were representatives of two different religious traditions: Orthodox Christian Svan and Sunni Muslim Adjarians. Regarding to sacral center construing principles it is interesting fact how to combine Sunni Muslim Adjarians their religious practice to already met Shia Muslim traditions as they continue to practice Muslim rituals in Shia mosques built by local Azerbaijani population. In the first period of Adjarians migration and settlement in kvemo Kartli villages they started to use already met mosques for their religious practice. As number of eco-migrant Adjarians became larger in size and create compact settlements they also tried to organize their own spaces for religious rituals. Along with old Shia mosques they organized separate sacral centers according to their Sunni Muslim traditions. Even though Adjarians could not build new mosques in new settlement places, they decided to buy living houses and reorganize them as their sacral space. 1

Among migrants from Svaneti there are different examples of organizing sacral space depending conditions in this regard in new settlement areas. Settlement areas should be divided into two main characteristics: abandoned territories (villages and cities) and especially organized free territories for eco-migrants by the government of Georgia. There are fixed different kind of sacral space organizing examples considering what kind of territories they settled in abandoned Christian villages/cities or newly formed settlements. Eco-migrants settled in the areas specially organized with standard living houses try to observe the principle of settlement, which existed in Svaneti

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1 See photos N1, N 2 taken by us during the field work in Tsalka district of Kvemo Kartli region
traditional life. Sacral space in places of their new settlements is organized by taking into consideration the environment terms and psychological-mental thinking of the migrants. After settlement, migrants are gathering and discussing through voting principles which church to build. The person, knowing traditional construction technologies, usually builds these shrines exactly by the architectural nuances preserved in the first dwelling. The population build mainly common shrine, which bears the name of the church that was considered to be the strongest among the other shrines of their former settlements. But these new build sacral centers cannot replaced older ones. Situation in this regard, is different when migrants are settling in territories where they are meeting already built churches and shrines. One example of such case is Tsalka district where eco-migrant Svans met old churches or ruins of shrines built by Turkish spoken Greeks. They continue to practice their religious rituals there. 

Conclusion

Migration and principles of settlement along migrants’ beliefs have great impact on tendencies of organizing new sacral spaces. Some elements of traditional life and culture in different ethnographic parts of Georgia were established for centuries in compliance with geographic environment. Living environment, the eco-migrants met in their nee settlement areas, differs from that traditional ethnographic environment of the highland, in which Svan and Adjarian eco-migrants lived. As a result, in new settlement areas organizing sacral spaces became quite unusual and different compared with traditional ones.

2 See photos N 3, N 4
Photo 1. Mosque built by Azerbaijanis population living in Tsalka region of Georgia. Photo is taken by us during the field work in Kvemo Kartli in 2017.

Photo 3. Old Christian Church built by Turkish spoken Greeks in 1846. Photo taken by us during the field works in Tsalka district of Kvemo Kartli region, 2017.


References:


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