

“Anti-marriage” in ancient Georgian society.

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ABSTRACT

One of the more striking features of the traditional cultures of the northeastern Georgian provinces of Pshavi and Xevsureti, is the premarital relationship known as c’ac’loba (Pshavi) or sc’orproba (Xevsureti). This relationship was formed between young women and men from the same community, including close relatives. It had a strong emotional, even intimate, component, yet it was not to result in either marriage or the birth of a child. Either outcome would have been considered incestuous. In this paper I will demonstrate that the Svans, who speak a Kartvelian language distantly related to Georgian, preserve a structurally-comparable ritual the designation of which — ch’æch’-il-ær — is formed from a root cognate with that of c’ac’-l-oba. On the basis of a comparative analysis of the Svan and Pshav-Xevsurian practices in the context of traditional Georgian beliefs concerning marriage and relationships between “in-groups” and “out-groups”, I will propose a reconstruction of the significance of *c’ac’-al- “anti-marriage” in prehistoric Kartvelian social thought.

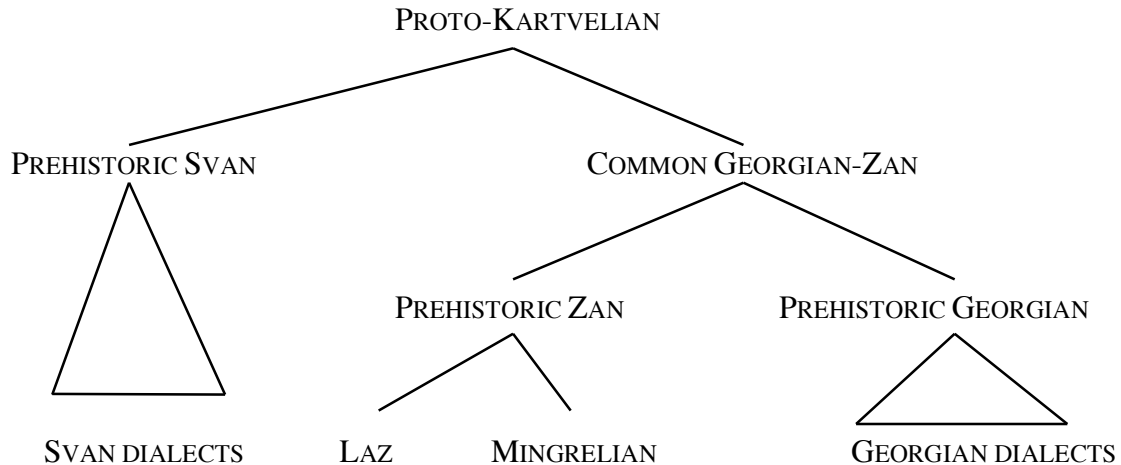
0. INTRODUCTION. For over a century, specialists in the study of Indo-European linguistics and history have examined the vocabulary of kinship and alliance of the IE languages for evidence of the familial and social organization of the ancestral speech community (e.g., Benveniste 1969; Friedrich 1966; Bremmer 1976; Szemerényi 1977). The three indigenous language families of the Caucasus have received far less attention in this regard; comparatively few studies have been made of the kinship vocabularies of the Northwest, Northeast or South Caucasian families, save for the inclusion of such terms in etymological dictionaries or inventories of basic lexical items (Shagirov 1977; Klimov 1964; Fähnrich and Sardshweladse 1995; Xajdakov 1973; Kibrik and Kodzasov 1990). Soselia (1979) provides a useful feature analysis of the core kinship vocabularies of the modern South Caucasian languages, and a brief reconstruction of the signification of these terms at the level of the proto-language. Wolfgang Schulze and this author (Schulze 1999; Tuite and Schulze 1998) have examined the history of lexical replacement of terms denoting affines, especially in Northeast Caucasian.

In this paper I will discuss two social institutions practiced by linguistically and geographically separate Kartvelian (South-Caucasian) communities: the Svans of the northwest highlands of the

Republic of Georgia, and the Georgian-speaking Pshavs and Xevsurs, sometimes grouped together under the ancient designation of Pxovians, of northeast Georgia (see map). Although the relationships formed in the context of Pshav c’ac’loba and Xevsur sc’orproba might not be considered kinship by some ethnologists (and the brief pairings formed by Svan č’æč’īlær certainly would not be), I will argue here that they go back to an antecedent relation which structurally contrasted with the institution of marriage in several important respects, and which represented a necessary preliminary to it. Charachidzé (1968: 101) qualified the Pxovian institution of c’ac’loba / sc’orproba as “anti-marriage”, a designation I will extend here to the ancestral relationship as well. Although my principal objective is to contribute to our knowledge of the Proto-Kartvelian lexicon and of the social practices of the associated speech community, the data and conclusion presented here may be of interest to comparativists seeking to understand the semantic matrices framing those particular bonds between individuals in various societies which ethnologists classify under the rubric “marriage”.

Before beginning my presentation of the ethnographic data, I will very briefly describe the Kartvelian language family. It comprises four languages — Georgian, Svan, and the closely-related Mingrelian and Laz. Of these, only Georgian has a long history of use as a written language (since at least the 5th c. AD). The family tree accepted by most scholars, and the one adopted by the authors of the Kartvelian etymological dictionaries (Klimov 1964; Fähnrich and Sardshweladse 1990), is shown below. According to the consensus view among Kartvelologists, Georgian and Zan form a single branch of the family; the ancestor of Svan is believed to have split off from the proto-language as early as the beginning of the 2nd mill. BCE (Klimov 1964: 34-5; Gamkrelidze and Ivanov 1984: 880-1).¹

Figure 1. The Kartvelian (South Caucasian) language family.



It is highly probable, therefore, that cognate lexemes in Georgian and Svan, which show the effects of sound changes characteristic of the evolution of these two branches of the Kartvelian family, go back to an antecedent form present in the Proto-Kartvelian lexicon. I hope to demonstrate here that the two quite different social practices designated by these cognate lexemes share, in some instances at a fairly abstract level, a significant number of semantic features, sufficient to reconstruct the outlines of the ancient Kartvelian institution of “anti-marriage”.

1. NORTHEAST GEORGIAN “ANTI-MARRIAGE”. In the Georgian highland province of Pshavi slightly over a century ago, “an unmarried woman lies with an unmarried man, an outsider (ucxo) with an outsider, often a relative with a relative. There are many cases as well of a married man and a married woman lying together, and everyone knows about this, there is no need to hide the fact” (Vazha-Pshavela 1889/1994: 157). Thus wrote the poet, and gifted amateur ethnographer, Vazha-Pshavela in 1889. The pre-/extra-marital relationship known to the Georgian mountaineers of Pshavi as c’ac’loba and to their neighbors of Xevsureti as sc’orproba

is described as a close friendship between a young man and woman, often marked by physical closeness and affection, yet not intended to end in either marriage or childbirth. The partners in this relationship are referred to in the Pshav dialect as c’ac’alni, nazmobi “sworn brother” and nadobi “sworn sister”; some poems refer to the boy as zma-kmara, an expression Charachidzé rendered “frère-époux” (Vazha-Pshavela 1886/1994: 70; Mak’alatia 1985: 127-8; Charachidzé 1968: 96-97). The Xevsurs employ the designations sc’orperni — literally “peers” or “equals” — and zmobili/ dobili “sworn brother/ sister”. As far as can be told, the practice was limited to the two northeast Georgian highland provinces just named, and has been extinct for forty years or more. Since it was first described over a century ago, it has been the subject of much speculation, misunderstanding and defensiveness. The Russian ethnographer Kovalevsky (1893) saw in c’ac’loba the survival of an ancient Caucasian matriarchy, whereas Mak’alatia (1985: 132), whose descriptions of Pshav and Xevsur society date from the 1920’s and 30’s, linked it to an ancient practice of “sacred prostitution” (samyvto rosk’ip’oba), which supposedly once accompanied the cult of Adgilis Deda, the “Place Mother”, in the Georgian mountains. The popular Georgian writer Mixeil Javakhishvili included a burlesque depiction of physical intimacy between sc’orperni in his novel “Tetri saq’elo”. To this day, urban Georgians frequently have this scene in mind when discussing the backward folkways of their highland cousins, much to the irritation of the latter and their academic defenders (Q’amarauli 1932: 98; K’ik’nadze’s foreword to Baliauri 1991). In his 1968 monograph on traditional Pshavian religion, Charachidzé devoted particular attention to the summarizing and analysis of the ethnographic materials then available to him on c’ac’loba and sc’orproba. He understood — correctly, I am convinced — that an accurate understanding of this practice is crucial to the reconstruction of the religious and social ideology of the Georgian mountaineers of the pre-Soviet period. In this same work Charachidzé compared c’ac’loba to a superficially similar practice from Svaneti in an attempt to demonstrate that the roots of c’ac’loba go deep into Kartvelian prehistory. I will argue here that the latter assertion of Charachidzé’s is correct, but for the wrong reasons. The Svanetian ethnographic dossier does indeed contain descriptions of a religious practice which shares a common origin

with c’ac’loba, but it is not the one Charachidzé had in mind. The Svanetian ritual of lič’æč’i or č’æč’īlær, although at first glance quite different from Pshav c’ac’loba or its Xevsur counterpart, upon deeper analysis reveals a significant number of shared features. In the following two sections of this paper c’ac’loba / sc’orproba and č’æč’īlær will be described, and their characteristics analyzed. The paper will conclude with some speculation on the origins and evolutions of these practices.

1.1. c’ac’loba and sc’orproba in Georgian folk poetry. Those who have had the occasion to browse through collections of Pshavian (Pshav-Xevsur) folk poetry doubtless have been struck by the sharp contrast between the two genres most prominently represented there. On the one hand are epic ballads of the martial exploits of real or legendary heroes, on the other are short, intense poems of love (requited and unrequited), separation, jealousy and retribution, sung to the accompaniment of the three-stringed pandur. These latter, as Vazha-Pshavela observed, are in large part inspired by the experience of c’ac’loba. Indeed, I have yet to read a description of c’ac’loba or sc’orproba that does not include at least a few poems such as this:

*šen, čemo dido imedo,
mzev, mopenilo dilita,
uk’vdavebisa c’q’aroo,
mosdixar okros milita,
šentanamc q’opnit gamazyo,
šentanamc c’ola-zilita.
šenisamc namglis q’ana mkna,
ro pxaze šageč’rebodi —
an šeni nandauri mkna,
guls dardad čageč’rebodi,
anamc, tasi mkna okrosi,*

You, my great hope,
Sun, spreading forth in the morning,
Source of immortality,
You flow through a pipe of gold,
May I be sated at your side,
Lying and sleeping beside you.
May I be a field for your sickle,
That I be mown by its blade —
Or may I become your sworn sister,
To feel pangs in my heart for you,
Or may I be a golden cup,

*ro yvinit agevsebodi,
daperili mkna c’itlada,
šamsvamdi — šagergebodi,
ana mkna movis p’erangi,
ro gulze dagadnebodi.*

(quoted by Vazha-Pshavela 1994: 368-9)

That I be filled with wine for you,
May I be tinted in red,
Drink me — I will refresh you,
May I be a silken shirt,
That I might melt on your heart.

Here is another, somewhat longer poem, which provides a useful description of how two c’ac’alni might have met a century or so ago:

*dyei sžobav tu yamei?
xalxno, me gk’itxav amasa.
yame niade k’argia,
dyei sinatit szalavsa.
xmeletze manatobeli
mzei maudis tanaca,
cxvar-zroxa maepineba,
mayla mtas, dabla č’alasa,
maašrobs dilis cvar-namsa,
mc’q’er q’anas et’q’vis salamsa.
magram ro yame ar iq’os,
isi ymertm daiparasa!
ra dadges yamis c’q’vdiadi,
bevrsa uxaris kalasa.
žmobiltan c’asvla ygulavis,
žnela ro daešalasa.
vačasac molodini akv,*

*Which is better, day or night?
People, I am asking you.
The night of course is very good
But day will outdo night in brightness.
It brings light to all the land;
When the sun climbs in the sky
The cattle and the sheep spread out,
Up in the mountain and down in the meadow,
The sun dries up the morning dew,
The quail in the field greets it.
But yet, if there would be no night,
May God save us from such a thing!
When the dark of night has come
A woman rejoices in her heart.
She longs to see her “brother-spouse,”
It would be hard to keep her away.
The lad as well, full of eagerness,*

*ar ucdis p'uris č'amasa,
c'ava, gaigebz loginsa,
gaibunbulebz čalasa.
gulšia gulis misnada,
tana k'i pikrobs amasa:
«k'i ara mamivides, ra,
rom rait daišalasa?»
kal midis c'q'nari bižiṭa,
ar ačučunebz čalasa,
amoit'olebz botlasa,
žalaptad manap'aravsā.
«ra q'inčad damzinebia!»
moq'me daic'q'ebz zarvasa.
kal male gamaayvizebz,
arc aleviebz xanasa.
q'ba ro q'bas gameet'olas,
mk'erdi mk'erds šaaxalasa.
uc'indel nacnauria,
nadobs ayaras malavsā, —
memr daic'q'eben k'ocnasa,
p'iridan nerc'q'vis p'arvasa.
dye tu ŷam, romeli žobnis?
xalxno, me gk'itxav amasa.
t'urpa kveq'ana tvalit čins,
sik'etit dyei žalavsā,
mušais samušaveblad,
sarčos šin mosat'anada,*

Cannot take time to eat his meal.
He goes and readies the bed for her,
Lays the sheets, fluffs up the straw.
Heart is working its magic on heart;
At the same time, he is thinking
“Could it be, she will not come,
Or that something has gone awry?”
The woman approaches, with quiet steps,
She draws not a rustle from the straw.
In her hand she carries a bottle
Of vodka, taken from her home.
The man pretends to be asleep,
Toying with his sister-spouse.
The woman quickly rouses him;
Neither wants to waste much time.
The jaw of one meets the other's jaw,
Chest is pushed up against chest.
His feelings for her have long been known,
He no longer hides them from her.
Then they begin to kiss each other,
Sharing slaver from each other's mouth.
Day or night, which is better?
People, I am asking you.
Our eyes can see the beauteous land,
Day thus outdoes night in kindness.
It gives the workers the chance to work,
To bring the food their households need.

<i>cxvar-zroxa maepinebis,</i>	<i>The cattle and the sheep spread out,</i>
<i>balaxs szovs mtasd da barada,</i>	<i>Grazing on mountain and lowland alike.</i>
<i>manatobeli kveq'nisa</i>	<i>It brings light to all the world,</i>
<i>mzei amua tanaca,</i>	<i>When the sun ascends the sky</i>
<i>gaašrobs dilis cvar-namsa,</i>	<i>It dries up the morning dew,</i>
<i>mc'q'er nanas et'q'vis q'anasa.</i>	<i>The quail in the grass sings a lullaby.</i>

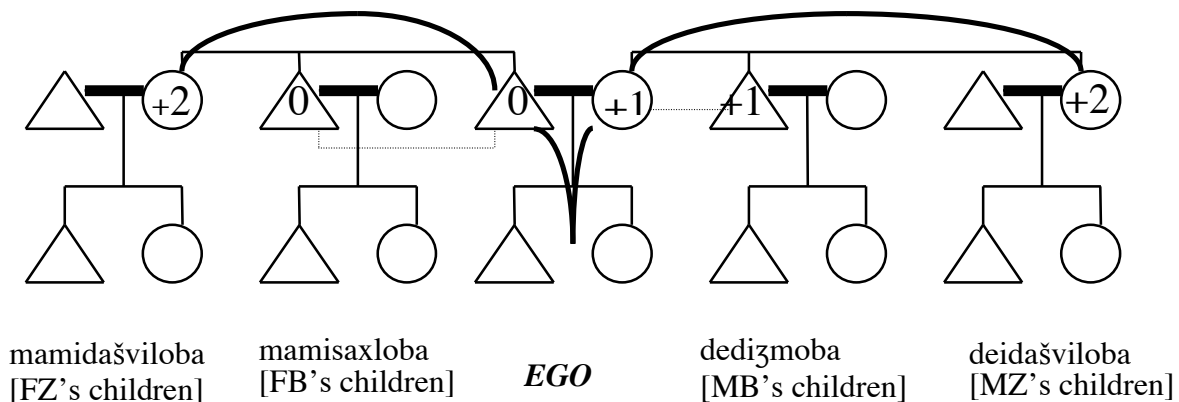
(Gomiashvili 1975: 144-146).

1.2. A typology of c'ac'loba and sc'orproba. The descriptions of Pxovian premarital relations given here draw upon Mak'alatia 1985 and Vazha-Pshavela 1964 for c'ac'loba, and Mak'alatia 1935, Q'amarauli 1932, Ochiauri 1980 and Baliauri 1991 for sc'orproba. The last-named monograph, compiled by a native Xevsur in the 1920's and 30's when the practice was still widespread, is an especially valuable resource for understanding how c'ac'loba and sc'orproba were experienced and perceived a century ago, when the religious system described by Bardavidze 1957, Charachidzé 1968 and K'ik'nadze 1996 was largely intact.² In her description of Xevsur sc'orproba, Baliauri proposed a sort of typology according to the following categories:

(a) Instances of “ORDINARY” SC'ORPROBA (also known as c'ola-dgoma “lying-standing”) were grouped by Baliauri according to the kin relation between the couple involved. There appear to be two key factors in the determination of genealogical distance in this patrilineal system. The first is the number of generations separating the individuals from their common ancestor. The second factor is the position of what I will call the linking woman, if any. I will assign the distance number “0” to ego's own patrilineage (no linking woman), “1” to MB/MF's lineage (linking woman = ego's mother), and “2” to MZ's and FZ's lineages, which seem to be regarded as equally distant in Xevsur genealogical reckoning (linking woman = ego's parent's sister).³ It should be pointed out that beyond linking-woman distances of 3 or 4, i.e. cousins linked through a grandparent's or great-grandparent's sister, Georgian kin tracking becomes increasingly vague

and selective, especially where female relatives are concerned (see, e.g., the kin charts in Dragadze 1988: 59; Xaradze 1939).⁴ Slightly further out marriage becomes a possibility; indeed, one may have no idea that the individual in question is anything other than an unrelated “outsider” (ucxo).

Figure 2. Genealogical distances of cousins (Xevsureti).



0. kal-mamisaxloba “woman and father’s house” (sc’orproba within village or father’s kin-group [gvare], which typically amounts to the same thing, at least in peoples’ conceptions).⁵ Within the circle of people considered “close” relatives (axlo natesavebi), those one refers to ordinarily as “sister” and “brother”, sc’orproba is engaged in spontaneously, with no need for the mediation of a third party nor much attention paid to the position of the legs or hands when lying together. When young people from the same village or gvare gather, they will pair off and sleep side by side on the roof (bani) in summer, or on the upper floor (č’erxo, ordinarily the place where the men sleep) in winter (Baliauri 1991: 70-72). Among members of the same patrilineage, up to 7-8 generations of separation (and often longer), any sexual contact is considered tantamount to incest, and dealt with accordingly.⁶ It is undoubtedly the fact that sex with one’s “sister” or “brother” would be (or ought to be) unthinkable that underlies the casual nature of sc’orproba within one’s mamisaxloba.

1. disc’ul-dedizmoba “sister’s child and mother’s brother’s family” (i.e. sc’orproba with someone of one’s mother’s patrilineage). These as well are considered “very tight relations” (*zalian mt’k’ice natesaoba*), assuming the role of surrogate parents should a child be orphaned, and playing an important function at funerals and in the afterlife (Baliauri 1991: 83; Charachidzé 1968: 60, 93, 262-3). Marriage with someone from one’s dedizmoba is rare and “irregular” (*c’esar aris*), but at least a possibility beyond 3-4 generations of separation. In addition to sc’orproba with a member of the household, the host dedizmoba can arrange for a visiting “nephew” or “niece” to spend the night with a local girl or boy (i.e. a co-villager, tantamount to a family member).

2. deida-mamidašviloba “mother’s sister’s and father’s sister’s children” (sc’orproba with someone of one’s aunt’s husband’s patrilineage, or in general, “among children of women who came from the same village”⁷). If a boy and girl are linked by closely-related mothers, then they can lie together without formality. Should their mothers be more distant relatives, they engage in sc’orproba with greater “reserve and observance of the rules” (*moridebita da c’esebis dacvit c’vebian ertad*), especially the rules relating to the positioning of the body and contact between the boy and the girl. Conversely, marriage between distant cousins is a distinct possibility, and indeed, not rare, although it is explicitly discouraged between those who had once been sc’orperni. This reflects the more general principle that “it is not acceptable to go from c’oladgoma [= sc’orproba] to marriage” (*ar aris miyebuli c’ola-dgomit col-kmrobaze gadasvla*) (Baliauri 1991: 96-98).⁸

x. size-colisdoba “son-in-law and wife’s sister” and zal-kmreuloba “daughter-in-law and husband’s family” (sc’orproba with a member of one’s fiancé(e)’s family or village). Traditionally, northeast Georgian mountaineers were promised in marriage at a very young age, sometimes even while still in the cradle, although marriage and cohabitation did not come until much later, around age 20 (Schyboll 1994). During this long period of engagement, young Xevsurs would from time to time visit the village of their betrothed, and be received by the latter’s family. Arrangements would be made, with the mediation of a young woman serving as

“envoy” (elči), for the visitor to spend the night with a local age-mate of the opposite sex, although this latter must under no circumstances be the fiancé(e). Since the sc’orperi thus chosen is, genealogically speaking, just as eligible a marriage candidate as the actual betrothed, the relationship of sc’orproba is negotiated and experienced with far more caution, reserve and vacillations of emotion than in the situations described above, and it should come as no surprise that on occasion the young couple thus brought together falls in love. Should the betrothed insist on breaking the engagement in order to remain with his or her sc’orperi, the result is, at a minimum, a great deal of trouble and hurt feelings, at worst — and not infrequently— violence, suicide and exile (Baliauri 1991: 107-115).

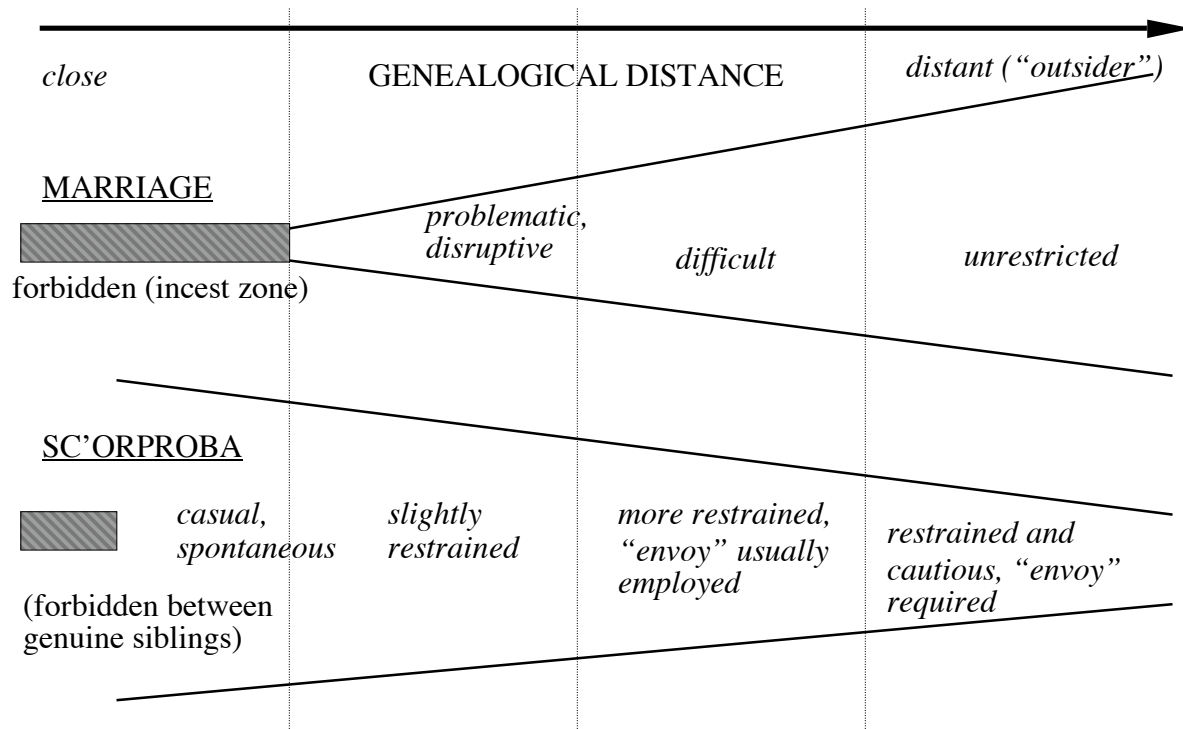
y. sc’orproba ucxoebtan “sc’orproba with outsiders” (ucxo = not related, nor from the same village or shrine community).⁹ Whenever a group of people from different households gathers together — hay-mowing, harvesting, wool-carding, weddings and even funerals — there is an opportunity for sc’orproba. Should a boy or girl wish to lie with someone who is not a fairly close relative, an “envoy” is asked to ascertain if the other party is receptive to the idea, and then to escort the boy or girl to the upper floor (č’erxo), or wherever the two plan to spend the night.

(b) SWORN-BROTHERHOOD (zmobiloba). Baliauri distinguishes ordinary sc’orproba, more often than not a night spent chatting accompanied by little more than affectionate cuddling, from zmobiloba, a genuine and relatively durable love-bond between two individuals. An individual will typically have only one zmobilni — the term, meaning “sworn brother”, is also applied to the female partner in Xevsur usage — and the relationship will endure up to, and sometimes after, marriage. Traditionally, the zmobilni married other people, “outsiders” chosen by their families whom they often scarcely knew before the wedding took place. It is the passion and inevitable heartbreak of zmobiloba which has given Pshav-Xevsureti some of its finest and most poignant oral literature.

1.2. c’ac’loba and sc’orproba as “anti-marriage”. The contrast between sc’orproba and marriage should be evident from Baliauri’s typology. The relationship of sc’orproba is most unrestrained and spontaneous with those relatives with whom marriage is strictly forbidden (i.e.

from within what might be called the “incest zone”). With more distant relatives, the negotiation of sc’orproba becomes more and more delicate (“envoys” are used, the couple is more attentive to the signals being given out by their body posture and movements), and marriage becomes less and less unthinkable, more and more of a possibility. Charachidzé made the same observation with regard to Pshav c’ac’loba : “Alors que les unions matrimoniales impliquent le respect d’une exogamie absolue, celle des c’ac’al se situe à la limite de l’inceste. Car ceux-ci se choisissent là où précisément le mariage est interdit : au sein du village ou du clan. Le couple c’ac’al peut unir les plus proches parents par le sang (à l’exclusion des frères et des soeurs proprement dits), appartenant à des maisons voisines” (1968: 101).

Figure 3. Optimal and problematic genealogical distances for marriage and sc’orproba.



This and other contrasts between the premarital and marital relations of the Pshavs and Xevsurs led Charachidzé to the important observation that c’ac’loba (and sc’orproba, which he does not discuss in much detail) “équivalent rigoureusement à un «anti-mariage», et cela à la fois sur le plan des rapports individuels et des relations sociales” (ibid: 101). He notes that c’ac’loba

and sc’orproba are based on individual choice and equality: either the girl or the boy can take the initiative in choosing a partner, and in breaking off the relationship. Each c’ac’al or sc’orperi presents gifts to the other, and gives voice to his or her feelings in poetry and song. The very term used by the Xevsurs to refer to the practice — sc’or-p(e)r-oba ‘peer/equal-ness’ — reflects this aspect of its nature. Marriage, on the contrary, is an asymmetrical institution, contracted between families, often without the consent of the young betrothed (who may in fact be too young to talk when his or her future spouse is chosen!) As elsewhere in the Caucasus, traditional customary law grants certain privileges to the husband that are not enjoyed by his wife, for example in matters of divorce and inheritance (for useful summaries in English, see Luzbetak 1951, Grigolia 1939/1980). In contrast to the love poetry inspired by c’ac’loba, the rare mentions of husband-wife relations in Georgian poetry tend to be ironic or sarcastic in nature (Tuite 1993, 1994). The relationship of c’ac’loba or sc’orproba must not be consummated in the form of either marriage or childbirth; it must remain uteslo “without seed”, i.e. without producing offspring. Mountaineers such as Vazha-Pshavela, Q’amarauli and Baliauri go to great lengths to emphasize the self-control required of young couples, to assure that their deep-felt affection and passion remains “pure”, untainted by the depravity (garq’vna) of premarital sex. Mak’alattia asserts that, when self-control failed, *coitus interruptus* was resorted to by the Xevsurs (1935: 170) and Pshavs (1985: 129), and Charachidzé (1968: 99) hypothesizes that the rhythm method was also employed to reduce the risk of pregnancy. All ethnographic accounts agree that the birth of a child to c’ac’alni or sc’orperni is a social catastrophe (e.g. Baliauri 1991: 30-31). The child is regarded as the fruit of incest, and the young couple face expulsion from their families, or worse: Vazha-Pshavela (1886/1994: 71), echoed by Mak’alattia (1985: 129), spoke of stoning as the punishment traditionally meted out by the community in such cases. In this respect as well, the trouble begins when, in Charachidzé’s words, “le couple «fraternel» ... tend à s’assimiler à un couple conjugal” (1968: 101). The primary functions of marriage are the begetting of offspring to assure the perpetuation of the family, and especially of the patriline; and the forging of a bond outside of the kingroup. Premarital relationships are primarily formed within this

exogamic group, and thus must remain uteslo.

There is one other feature of c’ac’loba and sc’orproba which contrasts them to marital relations and indeed almost all other forms of contact between the sexes. Baliauri cites a Xevsur saying which, translated literally, reads “mixing around does not mix a sc’orperi” (*sc’orpers mirev-moreva ar yrevs*) (Baliauri 1991: 63). The root -rev-, which in ordinary Georgian usage means “mix” or “mingle”, takes on a special connotation in the language of Pxoian theology. It signifies “to be in contact with a source of pollution”, of which the most common are a woman’s bloodflow (during menstruation or childbirth), and the bodies of the recently deceased (cp. Charachidzé 1968: 378-9; Tuite and Bukhrashvili 1999). As Baliauri explains, a man’s mother, sister or wife can pollute him (*miyriivan*), which can provoke the anger of the shrine (xat’i) if the man in question does not purify himself before approaching it. Contact with his zmobili or sc’orperi, by contrast, does not have this effect, since “whoever a girl or boy loves does not pollute them (*ar arevs*), and the shrine will not be angered”. Likewise, a Xevsur informant from Bacaligo interviewed by Bardavelidze (1982: 90) specified that whereas “it was forbidden to [‘pagan’] shrine assistants and priests to lay with their wives, it was permitted with their sc’orperi.” The Pshavs held a similar belief, according to Vazha-Pshavela: “c’ac’loba suits the vassal of Lasharis Jvari” (1886/1994: 71). Reference is made here to the principal shrine of Pshavi and its resident deity, the apotheosized son of Queen Tamar (to whom an equally important shrine, situated in a nearby valley, is dedicated). It was common in earlier times for couples to pair up for c’ac’loba while camping out near the major Pshav shrines (Ochiauri 1991: 81, 149, 197, 218). Festivals such as Atengenoba, which takes place in July and lasts for several days, require at least some of the attendees to spend the night near the shrine, which is typically an hour or more’s hike from the nearest village. On these occasions, and despite the proximity of the sanctuary and its touchy, often punitive patron deity, c’ac’loba was not only tolerated but positively encouraged. Even transgressions of sexual propriety are no cause for fear, as Vazha explains: “Should a Pshav commit depravity (*garq’vniloba čaidinos*) during the festival of Lasharis Jvari, it is not considered a sin, since ‘Lasharis Jvari himself loved women’” (loc. cit.;

cp. Charachidzé 1968: 651-2).

This last remark touches upon a critical element of Pxovian religious and social thought. The principal Pshav and Xevsur clans individually, as well as each province in its entirety, has a patron deity, always imagined as male in gender.¹⁰ Affiliated with each clanic sanctuary, and situated either nearby or at some distance, are one or more smaller shrines where prayers and offerings are presented to the dobilni “sworn sisters” of the patron deity. (The most celebrated among the dobilni is Samdzimari, worshipped along with her “sworn brother” St. George at Xaxmat’is Jvari in Xevsureti). This same term is commonly applied to female c’ac’alni and sc’orperni, and as Charachidzé (1968: sections 7 & 8) argues in detail, the “fraternal” couplings of deities and humans are seen as paralleling each other. More importantly, the practice of “anti-marriage” in both human and divine societies symbolically balances, in a sense, the paradox of marriage. As conceived by the Georgian mountaineers of a century ago, the institution of marriage was essential for the perpetuation of the community, and in particular of its central chain, the patrilineage. On the other hand, it necessitated the forming of an alliance with potentially-hostile “outsiders”, and the installation of a potentially-polluting woman in her husband’s household. Faced with paradoxes of this sort at a number of levels — not only marriage, but also the need for establishing and maintaining links of trade and mutual assistance with outsiders, including North Caucasian communities — Pxovian social ideology made available various mechanisms for conjoining the “interior” and the “exterior”, or the “pure” and the “impure” (Tuite 1998, 1999; Tuite and Bukhrashvili 1999).¹¹ So-called “believer-unbeliever sanctuaries” (ržulian-uržulo salocavebi), where nominally-Muslim Chechens and Ingush are invited to pray and offer sacrifices alongside their nominally-Christian Georgian neighbors, are one such mechanism; c’ac’loba and sc’orproba, the “anti-marriage” of a young woman and her “brother-spouse” (zma-kmara), is another.

2. Svanetian č’æč’læ. According to what appears to have been the most widespread indigenous account of the origins of sc’orproba, it originated only a few centuries ago, when

female shepherds in the mountain pastures took to sleeping at the side of their male friends for protection from marauding North Caucasians (Schyboll 1994). There are in fact good reasons for believing that the common ancestor of sc’orproba and c’ac’loba is much older than that, and indeed it would appear that an antecedent form of c’ac’loba was known to Early Bronze Age Georgian society, before the separation of the speech community whose descendants now inhabit Upper and Lower Svaneti. Charachidzé stated that the discovery of a Svan correlate to c’ac’loba and sc’orproba could imply that they represent “des survivances d’une institution archaïque, en honneur chez les Géorgiens antérieurement à leur séparation” (1968: 109)). Charachidzé, and before him Xaradze 1939, believed that the Svanetian ritual known as linturæ̌l (literally, “relationship”) was the sought-after cognate practice. The best-known first-hand description of linturæ̌l comes from the pen of Besarion Nizharadze, an Upper Svan priest contemporary with Vazha-Pshavela, and like him an amateur ethnographer. This bond could be formed between two people of the same sex, but was most commonly pledged between a young woman and man, who are not otherwise related. The young man is invited to the woman’s house, and once there, “kneels before her on one knee and says: ‘Should I be on your breast or you?’, that is, ‘Will you be my mother or I your father’? Let us suppose that the woman wishes to be the mother. She opens her shirt, and exposes her right breast. The young man sprinkles salt on it, then approaches and sets his teeth three times on the tip of the breast, saying three times *si di, mi gezal* (You mother, I son). ... From this day forward, the woman and man are as blood relatives. They not only spend time together, they often lie together as well” (1889/1962: 210-212). At first glance, linturæ̌l appears to be quite similar to c’ac’loba: a fictive kinship between two unmarried people (at least not married to each other) of opposite sex involving a degree of physical intimacy. As it turns out, linturæ̌l represents little more than a local elaboration of a ritual of artificial adoption, marked by the simulation of suckling at a woman’s, or even a man’s, breast, as found in many Caucasian communities, especially in the west. Gabliani (1927: 87-88) describes numerous instances of Svan peasants demanding to be adopted by their local Tsarist administrator, to the point that the latter’s “shirt collar was always undone and his chest exposed”. In 19th-century

Abkhazia, “un adulte peut être reçu dans une autre grand’famille en qualité d’enfant s’il a baisé trois fois le sein de la mère de famille” (Byhan 1936: 150). In some North Caucasian communities, such as the Circassians and the Karachays, ritual adoption through kissing a woman’s breast could be enacted to avoid blood-feuds between families (Colarusso 1994; Volkova and Ormrod 1994). Furthermore, linturæ̌l, like its Abkhaz, Circassian and Karachay counterparts, is only performed between unrelated people (unlike c’ac’loba and sc’orproba), and what is thereby established is a relation of artificial parenthood, rather than siblinghood.

Ironically, in the same book where she compares c’ac’loba and linturæ̌l, Xaradze describes a second Svan ritual which, I argue here, is both in name and in function cognate with the Pshav and Xevsur institution of anti-marriage (1939: 92-95). The practice is called variously lič’æč’i or č’æč’ilæ̌r. According to the descriptions known to me, it is performed at weddings, and during certain feasts celebrated by groups of neighboring households called lask’æ̌r. A lask’æ̌r comprises two or more households from the same section of a village, which unite for purposes of mutual assistance and defense, and to share the costs of hosting festivals (Xaradze 1963). Certain feast days are hosted by one household of the lask’æ̌r one year, for the benefit of the other members of the group; another household of the lask’æ̌r plays host the next year, and so on in rotation. Here is a description of lič’æč’i as performed at the feast of Likwreš (the name of which appears to contain the root kora “household”), celebrated in late January in the Upper Svan village Ushgul:

Next to the hearth they placed a small round Svanetian table (pičk), upon which they set the cooked meat of a sacrificed animal, finely-cut slices of fresh cheese, and two drinking vessels: one called Barblæ tæ̌s (“The cup of St. Barbara”) or nišan (“sign”) for the man, and an ordinary cup for the woman. These vessels were filled with best-quality strong vodka. The oldest man of the lask’æ̌r left the common banquet table, called to the oldest woman, and together they stood before the small round table. First the man and then the woman took the cups filled with vodka from the table, they toasted the well-being of the lask’æ̌r, drank the vodka, then kissed each other, danced together, and finally returned to

the banquet table. Two-by-two, man and woman, all members of the lask'ær performed the lič'æč'i ritual, in decreasing order of age (Bardavelidze 1941: 30-1).

There is evidence of the ritual being performed at Krisdeš (Christmas) at K'ala and Ushgul, in honor of the female deity Lamaria (St. Mary); and during the late-winter feast of Limp'æriel (the Torch-feast, equivalent of Georgian Lamp'roba, falling on the Sunday after Likwreš, in late January) (Bardavelidze 1939: 54-56; 1941: 30-33, 76; 1957: 72-73).¹²

Xaradze's description of č'æč'īlær in the context of a Svanetian wedding is only slightly different. It occurs during that phase of the wedding known as liq'iāēl, which marks the definitive transfer of the bride to her husband's home, and which culminates with the bride's circumambulation of her father-in-law's hearth three times, a ritual which is also part of Pshav wedding ceremonies (Grigolia 1939: 73). The č'æč'īlær ritual is performed by the front door of the groom's house:

During the meal (lencil), they set cushions by the entry doors of the house, before which they set vodka. Two by two the women and men go to the cushions, kneel down, and drink the vodka; the host brings them sliced boiled eggs on a plate and sliced cheese, and he feeds them one after the other. The woman and man drink the vodka with folded hands, after which they kiss each other. This ritual is called č'æč'īlær. The oldest people begin the č'æč'īlær followed by the younger ones, finally even the children kneel down, girls and boys, but they do not give them vodka to drink. The man chooses which woman to kneel with (Xaradze 1939: 94).

Granted, the resemblance between these rituals and the premarital relationships of the Pshavs and Xevsurs is not immediately evident, and it is doubtless this fact, as well as the rather undramatic and nonce character of the č'æč'īlær pairing that led to its being overlooked by Xaradze and Charachidzé. A structural comparison yields several common features, however:

1. The coupling of men and women from the same group (here, the neighboring households composing the lask'ær)
2. The syntagmatic contrast with marriage (in Pshavi, c'ac'loba precedes marriage in the life-

course of each individual, in Svaneti, the č’æč’īlæ ritual precedes the final rite symbolizing the transfer of the bride to her husband’s household)

3. The use of vodka (a bottle of which is brought by the girl when she meets her c’ac’ali or sc’orperi; vodka is drunk after the toast during č’æč’īlæ). The vodka drunk by Caucasian mountaineers is a home-brewed product, destined primarily for domestic consumption. In Pshav-Xevsureti it thus enters into a contrast with beer, which is brewed by the shrine personnel before the major feast-days for consumption on these occasions (wine, which was traditionally imported from the shrine’s vineyards in eastern Georgia, had essentially the same ritual uses as beer). The two contrasted alcoholic beverages are employed to label the two principal stages of the Xevsur wedding. The first stage, known as araq’it korc’ili “vodka wedding” or gzat aqsna “opening of the path”, marks the fiancée’s first stay at her betrothed’s household, for one night only (Baliauri 1991: 124, 184). The wedding proper, also known as ludit korc’ili “beer wedding”, celebrates the bride’s transfer to the groom’s home, in which she is accompanied by a procession of male and female escorts known as maq’rebi. The beer served at the ceremony is garnished with dollops of chilled refined butter (erbo), and is called saq’e(e)no, the same term used by the Pshavs to refer to the wine or beer served in a large dish at the summer festival of Atengenoba (Ochiauri 1980: 118).

4. The relationships are temporary (that of č’æč’īlæ lasting only the duration of the ceremony).

5. Just as c’ac’loba and sc’orproba were associated with female deities such as Samdzimari and Tamar (the Pshav goddess, not the 13th-century Georgian queen), the Svanetian lask’æ feasts during which č’æč’īlæ is performed feature the invocation of the divinities Lamaria and Barbol, who in all likelihood stem from the same pre-Christian goddess. The table holding the cups of vodka and morsels of food is placed before the hearth, the site where on other occasions the women of the household pray to Lamaria. Charachidzé (1987: 100-105) sees in Lamaria a Vesta-like hearth goddess borrowed from an Indo-European-speaking source, almost certainly the Alanic ancestors of the Ossetes. In my view, Lamaria is a composite character: if some of her traits are indeed Vestal, in other important respects she resembles her distant Xevsur cousin

Samdzimari, for whom the hearth is one end-point of a mythic trajectory which takes her from the remote exterior to the domestic interior and back again (Tuite 1998, 1999). The marital relationship, by contrast, begins with the circumambulation of the hearth-chain by the bride; in some communities she does this twice, once in her father’s home to take leave of her patrilineage of origin, and then in her groom’s home, to symbolize her integration into the latter’s household. The hearth-chain, unlike the hearth, has strong symbolic associations with the integrity and continuity of patrilineage (Charachidzé 1986: 125-130; 198), and its patron deity (where there is one) is of male gender, e.g. the Ossetic god Safa.¹³

The postulation of a common antecedent for c’ac’loba and č’æč’ılæ is rather more straightforward at the phonological level than at the semantic. Georgian c’ac’al- and Svan č’æč’-ıl- would go back to a Proto-Kartvelian root *č’ač’- or perhaps *č’āč’-, if one reconstructs a phonological distinction of vowel length in Proto-Kartvelian, as Gamq’relidze and Mach’avariani (1965) have done.¹⁴ The regular correspondance of the Georgian series /s, c, c’/ to Svan and Zan /š, č, č’/ has been explained by the postulation of a third Proto-Kartvelian sibilant series, variously written /*s^l, *c^l, *c’^l/ or /*ś, *č, *č’/ (Gamq’relidze and Mach’avariani 1965).¹⁵ In Georgian the daughter form of *č’ač’- has undergone addition of the suffix -al (which appears in a number of nouns derived from verb or nominal stems), and the abstract-noun formant -ob-a to give c’ac’al-, c’ac’loba. Svan č’æč’ılæ appears to be the plural of a derived noun, possibly a diminutive,¹⁶ whereas li-č’æč’-i is a deverbal noun known as a masdar, somewhat like an infinitive (cp. li-šxb-i ‘to sew’) (Topuria 1967: 211, 230).

3. CONCLUSION: THE EVOLUTION OF KARTVELIAN ANTI-MARRIAGE. The comparison of c’ac’loba with a Svanetian ritual sharing several features, and bearing an etymologically-related name, supports Charachidzé’s hypothesis that a type of “anti-marriage” was known to the prehistoric Georgians. An examination of the features shared by c’ac’loba and č’æč’ılæ, set in opposition to the principal characteristics of marriage as experienced by the mountaineers of the Central Caucasus a century ago, is a first step toward reconstructing the semantics of ancient

Kartvelian “anti-marriage”.

Table 3. Pxovian and Svan marriage and “anti-marriage”

MARRIAGE	<i>C'AC'LOBA / LICH'ÆCH'I < *ċ'aċ'-</i>
perpetuation of the patrilineage	infertile, “without seed”
male deity, hearth chain (symbol of lineage)	female deity (Lamaria, Barbol; Samdzimari and <u>dobilni</u>), hearth
durable	temporary
asymmetric	egalitarian
creates new alliance	reinforcement of bonds within the group
partner from outside of the group	partner from within the group
risk of “pollution”	not polluting
taboos, restrictions; silence	tender, informal; song and poetry
beer	vodka

This is of course a skeletal description; we may never know much about the flesh that covered it. Is the short-lived bond established by the Svan ritual closer in nature to its distant antecedent, or the emotionally-rich and often tragic premarital relationship celebrated in Pxovian poetry? Did early Svan religion once have paired male and female deities whose relationship paralleled that of human anti-marriage? There is some evidence that Lamaria-Barbol might hark back to a dobili goddess like the Xevsur Samdzimari (Tuite 1996), but much work remains to be done. Future research might also reveal useful parallels or contrasts between Kartvelian anti-marriage and real or imagined (quasi)-incestuous relations in other cultures, which contrast with exogamous marriage in a symbolic field responding to what is felt to be the paradoxal dependency of the

continuity of the local group on the mediation of outsiders (Moore 1964; Vernant 1963/1996). What does follow from the etymology proposed here, and the accompanying paleo-sociological analysis, is the ancientness of certain binary oppositions in Kartvelian social ideology (male/female, inside/outside, “pure”/“impure”), and of conjunctive mechanisms in the symbolic system which seek, not so much to subordinate or quash one in favor of the other, as to bring them together to assure the survival of the community.

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NOTES

¹ Although I have little confidence in the glottochronological method employed by Klimov to arrive at his dating, the positioning of the split in what would correspond to the Transcaucasian Middle Bronze Age is plausible for other reasons. Svaneti does not appear to have been inhabited before the Bronze Age, at which time there appears evidence of settlement and of active exploitation of local sources of arsenic-rich copper. Toward the middle of the 3rd millennium BCE, according to the archeological record, Transcaucasia is witness to sudden and thorough-going sociocultural change. Many Early Bronze settlements were abandoned. Ceramic and architectural styles abruptly changed: the distinctive Kuro-Araxes black pottery and roundish houses with a central hearth were conspicuously rare in the Middle Bronze Age, while kurgans, containing artefacts of a sort usually associated with early Indo-European populations, became more numerous in Transcaucasia (Dshaparidze 1991; Gej 1996). It was during this period of extensive change, I believe, that contact between Svaneti and the rest of Georgia was interrupted to a degree sufficient to allow the proto-Svan and proto-Georgian-Zan dialects to drift apart. By the time the Svanetian copper mines were reintegrated into regional commercial networks later in the Middle Bronze Age (Kušnareva and Rysin 1996), Svan may have already become a distinct language.

² During my visits to Pshavi and Xevsureti in the summers of 1995-97 and 1999, I occasionally inquired about the fate of c’ac’loba and sc’orproba. Those I asked situated the decline of these practices in the decades leading up to World War II, a period marked by significant social and infrastructural change in the Georgian highlands (construction of roads, opening of elementary schools and medical clinics, and overall the facilitating of more frequent contact with the lowlands). But a handful of Xevsurs stated that it was the events of the early 1950’s that sounded the death-knell of sc’orproba and several other practices retained from the pre-Soviet religious system. At this time the entire population of Xevsureti, save for that of the southernmost villages,

was removed — by force if necessary — to the near-desert districts of southeastern Georgia. The Soviet Georgian government reversed its decision some twenty years later, but by then much of traditional Xevsur culture had been irreversibly changed.

³ Basic kin relations are abbreviated: B = brother, F = father, M = mother, Z = sister.

⁴ The Daghestanian peoples, by contrast, would appear to be better equipped to keep track of these more distant relatives, if one judges on the basis of their kinship terminology, e.g. Archi: šekér-t:u-[r] “1st cousin” (suffix -r for female); i-šekér-t:u-[r] “2nd cousin”; ej-šekér-t:u-[r] “3rd cousin [*četverujurodnaja sestra*]” (Kibrik et al 1977; cp Kibrik and Kodzasov 1990: 55-56). One wonders if the distinction between Northeast Caucasian “endogamy” (or “cousin marriage”, as some Soviet ethnographers described it), and South and Northwest Caucasian “exogamy” might not be more a matter of ideology rather than practice. A Daghestanian might marry a 3rd or 4th cousin by endogamic preference; a Georgian might marry a comparably distant relative thanks to a “structured forgetfulness” (Lanoue 1999), which permits the potential spouse to be classified as an “outsider”. Genealogical memory may undergo flattening as well as pruning in the course of time. During a visit to the Xevsur village Datvisi, Bardavelidze (1982: 25-26) recorded the genealogies of the founders of several named kin groups. A generation later, she revisited Datvisi and asked the same question. Tilila, Toxolča and Idia, the eponymous founders of the principal patrilineages still represented in the village (this was after the mass deportations of the 1950’s), were recalled by her informant as three brothers, whereas in the earlier genealogy these individuals belonged to three distinct generations (Tilila was said to be the FB of Toxolča and the FFB of Idia).

⁵ Note that the kinterm biza, which in standard modern Georgian refers to “uncle” (FB, MB), in earlier usage denoted the FB specifically, or more loosely any man of father’s generation belonging to ego’s gvari (Orbeliani 1966 I: 103; Goginashvili 1988).

⁶ Baliauri relates the tragic story of Xevsur sc’orperni separated by 6 or 7 generations (mamani, lit. “fathers”) begetting a child. The girl killed the newborn child, a boy, and was expelled by her

family; the child’s father was pursued and eventually killed by his own “brothers” (ibid: 79). As noted by Xaradze (1949) [cited by Mamulia 1979: 34-35], marriage within a Xevsur gvari can be arranged if the couple concerned is not deemed to be too closely related, and if the gvari itself is formally split. This requires a formal declaration, sometimes accompanied by the placing of a stone marker (samani) in the shrine precincts, that the “father-brotherhood has been split” (mama-zmoba gaq’rilia), and that the two new lineages are no longer bound by obligations of mutual aid, shared responsibility in blood feuds, etc.

⁷ “*agretve šinšoben erti soplis disc’ulebi, miuxedavad gvarebisa*”. The verb in this sentence is based on the root šinš- a kinterm apparently of Vainax (Chechen-Ingush) origin. Its core meaning is “MZ’s child” — conceived as the most ‘distant’ of the cousin relations — although in some areas its sense has expanded to include FB’s child (called mamit šinši by the Xevsurs), or FZ’s child (Xaradze 1940; Dzhavaxadze 1971, 1986; Ghlont’i 1974 II: 249).

⁸ In Pshavi likewise, according to Vazha, “it is not possible for a c’ac’ali to take his c’ac’ali as a wife; this would be strongly disapproved of” (*c’ac’als ar šeužlian tavisi c’ac’ali colad šeirtoš, es didi dasazraxisi sakme ikneba*) (1914/ 1994: 369).

⁹ The usage of ucxo to designate those not classified as kin is also attested in medieval Georgian documents (Mamulia 1979: 40-41).

¹⁰ Many of these deities bear the names of Christian saints, although they may have little else in common with their namesakes. One of the chief Xevsur shrines, in the village Gudani, is named yvtismšobeli, literally “the one who gave birth to God”, a title of the Blessed Virgin in the language of Georgian Orthodoxy (= Greek *Theotokos*). Curiously, but in a manner consistent with the principle described here, the local worshippers imagine their patron deity as *male*, and as having auxiliary dobilni (Bardavelidze 1982: 18-20).

¹¹ As noted by anthropologists studying the Melanesian societies of the Solomon Islands, which have symbolic systems similar in certain respects to those of the northeast Georgians, the labelling of women and their menstrual/childbirth blood as “impure” or “polluting” is at best a

gross simplification of indigenous conceptions, at worst completely misleading. See, e.g. Keesing 1982, Maranda and Maranda 1970.

¹² According to five natives of Upper Svaneti (four from Mest’ia, one from Mulax) whom I asked to describe this ritual, č’æč’īlæ is still performed at the late-winter feast of Likwreš. The older informants provided descriptions roughly similar to that of Bardavelidze. Two of the younger informants, in their 40’s more or less, noted that two men may drink the č’æč’īlæ toast together, as a token of faithfulness or reconciliation. This is clearly an innovation, and in all probability a recent one at that.

¹³ If the Svanetian goddess Lamaria reflects Indo-European influence on an indigenous Caucasian religious system, Safa is almost certainly an example of the reverse. His name (evidently borrowed through an East Circassian dialect; Proto-Northwest-Caucasian ***šaš^oə* > East Circ. **šafə*) and many of his attributes are cognate with the Abxaz blacksmith-god Shashwy, patron of the patrilineage and guarantor of oaths (Adzhindzhal 1969: 234ff; Dumézil 1978: 140-141; Kaloev 1992).

¹⁴ Fährnich (1985) has in fact reconstructed such a root, **č’ač’-*, on the basis of a comparison of Georgian č’ac’-al- (“Freund[in], Geliebte[r]”) and Svan č’ač’-ul- “doll” (“Puppe”). The latter word may indeed represent a distinct semantic specialization of the Svan č’æč’- root under discussion here, although in view of the sizeable number of Svan expressive lexemes with two /č’/s linked to children (e.g. č’anč’ōrix “children speak sweetly”, č’ič’ “child’s fart”, č’uč’ “penis, in children’s speech” (Lip’art’eliani 1994: 333-338), simple coincidence cannot be ruled out.

¹⁵ Schmidt (1962), who regards the Svan and Zan reflexes of this series as essentially unchanged since the proto-language, would presumably reconstruct **č’ač’-*.

¹⁶ č’æč’īlæ = “the little č’æč’-es”? The formant -īl- might also be related to the -al- in č’ac’al-, though this presents some phonological as well as semantic difficulty.