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TRUSO, IN WAITING FOR HAPPY PEOPLE

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Abstract. For centuries, Georgia, due to its geopolitical, economic, and social factors has been the migration arena for different ethnic groups and peoples. Over time, some groups of migrants blended with the local population or with other ethnic entities, while the rest, managed to preserve their national specifics till the end. This process was particularly evident in the borderline regions of Georgia, among them, in Truso, one of the most ancient parts of Georgia. Truso is a rather rich and interesting gorge owing to its historical past, socio-economic and political importance, mode of life of its population, and the development of its material and spiritual culture.

The aim of this work is to observe the history of the Truso Gorge in the realm of the developments that took place there, starting from the 18th century; viewing it as the arena of mutual settlement of Georgians and Ossetians, traditional cohabitation, and the area of certain cultural diffusion.

The methodological study is based on the method of Contrastive analysis of historical sources, fact-finding, and content analysis.

Discussion. From ancient times, Truso was inhabited by the Dvals, one of the Georgian ethnic groups, but in the first quarter of the 18th century, a new ethnic element, namely Ossetians emerged there, who introduced specific elements of life and traditions in the region and factually correlated the existing indigenous culture; though Truso as the region of the old Georgian settlement preserved the basic elements of national culture, namely: Georgian writing culture and Georgian writing system in the form of epigraphic monuments, tower houses, characteristic for the mountainous regions of Georgia (Svaneti, Khevsureti, Mtiuleti, Tusheti), backed towers (towers with one the rounded side) designed for the fortification means, and many other artifacts that at one glance seem remote and hard to reach, in reality, is very near and their historical chronometry is imprinted on the sites of 17 deserted villages of the Truso gorge. as if the time has stopped in Truso where neither Georgian highlanders, Dvals, nor Ossetians live there today. One part of Ossetians returned to their historical homeland, the second part would live in different parts of Georgia. As for the Dvals, this ethnographic group does not exist today anymore, though their surnames are preserved in current Georgian onomastic in the form of the Dvalishvili, the Dvaladze, the Dvali, the Dvalaishvili, the Tualoisdze, etc. Ossetians that stayed in Georgia, live in different historical regions of the country and are actively involved in its political, economic, and cultural life. They are represented in the state management system, in scientific circles, in sports, business, and other spheres. They participate in the country's defense, represent Georgia at various international meetings and talks, scientific forums, and sporting events and their majority consider Georgia to be their homeland. Frankly speaking, it is rather awkward for Georgians and Ossetians, the descendants of King Tamar and Davit Soslan, Quins of Borena and Bordokhan, the ones who have been tied with the oath of loyalty throughout the centuries and managed to preserve our country overcoming the historical calamities, when today, the third-party lectures us about the necessity of peace. While Truso, as the strategic region of Georgia and the area of Georgian-Ossetian cultural diffusion still waits for the people who would care for the past and ensure the happy, successful future of the gorge.

Keywords: Truso, Georgian highlanders – Dvals, Ossetians of Georgia, XVIII century, cultural diffusion, Caucasasia.

Any sphere of science is necessary to gain a happy future. Science and the process of looking for something new is the source of happiness, when we try to find something hidden from our eyesight or even if it is somewhere next to us, we still need the shrewd eye of a scientist and thorough research to see it. Our coming to this world is meaningless if we are not struggling for happiness, said one great Greek man, and no matter how strange it may seem, for us, history is the very branch of science that combines all interdisciplinary studies and shows us the direction, which is the best path leading towards the happiness for the mankind. Peoples of the world, listen to history as it is the best adviser that displays where, when, how and why this or that developments took place and at the same time gives us the possibility to decide how to act today, how to solve the facing us problems better than we would have done in the past. Let us look into the history, listen to its pulse and it would inevitably show us where to look for the key to happiness.

The main aim of our report today is to present Truso, a small part of our country, hidden in the high mountains of the Caucasus that might become a source of happiness for those who visit this wonderful place and encounter its rich and diverse history.

This is not just one part of our country, its role in the system of strategic security of Georgia is very important.

As you may know Georgia, due to its geopolitical, economic, and social factors, was the place of migration for different ethnic groups throughout the centuries. Over time, part of migrants blended with locals or other ethnic groups, while the rest managed to preserve their ethnic identity almost intact. This process was particularly tangible in the border zone regions of Georgia, among them in one of the oldest Truso Gorge. The Truso Gorge is a rather rich and interesting place with its historic past, its socio-economic and political meaning, the lifestyle of the local population, and its material and cultural developments.

Let us track down the history of Truso, the ancient part of Georgia; let us analyze its strategic role at all stages of the development of Georgian statehood. The importance of the region has dramatically increased in the realm of the strategic security of the modern Georgian state. The work is based on the method of comparative analysis of historical sources, the study of documents, and content analysis.

Historically, the Truso gorge has always played one of the most important roles in the defense system of Georgia. Today, thanks to its location it has the same meaning for present-day Georgia; it is situated at the slopes of the natural border of Georgia, i.e. at the northern slope of the main ridge of the Caucasus mountains, at the mouth of the river Terek and is in the composition of Kazbegi municipality of Mtskheta-Mtianeti region. Consequently, it borders part of Russia, namely, Abkhazia, the republic of North Ossetia from the north, and occupied by the Russian Federation Georgian municipalities of Akhalkalaki and Javakheti, from the southwest and the west; and finally, it borders Dusheti municipality from the southeast.

According to Georgian and foreign sources, the Truso gorge from ancient times has been in the composition of the Kartli kingdom that was formed at the end of the 4th and the beginning of the 3rd centuries BCE and acquired particular strategic importance during the Roman rule, when the defense of the eastern provinces of the empire was on stake and the Kartli Kingdom as “the ally and friend of Rome” was assigned to control the roads leading to the North Caucasus. Rome paid special attention to the security of this region, as it was the important leverage for the detention of uncontrolled military forces of the Northern Caucasus.

Roman Empire since the 1st century BCE would ensure the safeguarding of the eastern provinces by the strengthening of the fortification systems, which were constructed by the Kartli Kingdom in the previous centuries; all these were in the interests of the Kings of Kartli too. Such compromising policy towards the Kartli Kingdom was conditioned by these mutual interests. The Doors of the Caucasus, as well as the Truso Gorge, played the decisive role in the epoch of confrontations between Roman and Parthian Kingdoms, Rome and Sassanid Iran, and in the relations of these states. During the negotiations, the Doors of Caucasus would be on the agenda, and often it was decisive in defining the conditions of truce or peace treaty.

During the weakening of the Roman Empire, Georgian kings would try to fortify and control the north Caucasian passes independently, relying on their efforts. Though,

centuries-long external factors (Rome, Parthia, Sassanid Iran) determined the political, economic, and cultural closeness of Georgian and North Caucasian peoples. This closeness is well reflected as in traditional lifestyle, so in historic annals, oral traditions, and legends.

The annals call the passes of the Caucasus guarded by the Kartli Kingdom from the south, “the Door to the Caucasus”. Their description can be found with historians of the antique period. According to Pliny the Elder “the Door to the Caucasus ... is a huge creation of nature, the result of the sudden split of the mountains. The pass itself is fortified with iron bars. A fortress is built on the opposite bank of the river to halt the waves of numerous tribes” ... (C. Plinii Secundi. *Naturalis Historiae*, Liber VI.). Similar and relatively more precise sources are encountered in the ancient Georgian book “Moktsevai Kartlisai” (resp.: The Conversion of Kartli); the first authentic texts of the book are written as early as the 4th century. According to the book when the Persian rule strengthened in Kartli “after the conquer of Kartli they entered the Caucasus and seized the doors of Ovsta (resp.: Ossetia) and also one huge door of the same Ossetians and two doors at Dvaleti and one at Parchuan Durdzuketi and put the highlanders to guard them” (Moktsevai Kartlisai, p. 723-72). This note directly indicates that Ovseti (resp.: Ossetia) was beyond “the Doors of the Caucasus” and the Persians would fortify the four passes: The Door to the Caucasus, at the pass to Ossetia, two doors at the pass from Dvaleti to Ovseti (resp.: Ossetia) and one door at the pass with Dzurdziks and put Mtielebi¹ (resp.: highlanders) to guard the doors.

According to historic sources from the 2nd century AD, on the territory of Truso and historic “Khevi” (name of the mountainous region) would live Tsanars, Georgian tribes who during the early feudal epoch played an important role in the defense from the raids of North Caucasian nomadic tribes and the formation of Georgian political entity (Kakheti Principality). This is verified in numerous Georgian and Foreign narrative sources; it is also reflected in the architectural (cult, Christian², and civilian) monuments, in epigraphic materials, etc.

In the 5th century, after the campaign of Vakhtang Gorgasali, the king of Kartli, to the North Caucasus and the establishment of strong ties with the highlanders of that region, he entrusts the safeguarding of the Doors of the Caucasus and other passes of the Caucasian mountains to the local population. The population of the Truso and Mna gorges was to guard the Door of the Caucasus and control the adjoining strategic defense system. According to Juansher, the historian of Vakhtang Gorgasali, King Vakhtang campaigned to the North Caucasus, subdued the Ossetians “erected the doors of Ovseti (resp.: Ossetia), which we would also call Dariali. And “built the doors of Ovsetia (resp.: Ossetia) that we would often call Dariali doors. And we built high towers and assigned Georgian highlanders to defend them” (Juansher 1955: p. 156). So it says that the king constructed fortresses in the Dariali (Terek) Gorge at the passes to Ossetia, which should serve to strengthen the mentioned in other sources “the Doors to the Caucasus” and other passes too which must have been two doors, leading from Dvaleti to Ossetia (mentioned

¹Mtielebi, collective name of the population of mountains in Georgia that comprised the population of Khevi, Mtiuleti-Gudamakari, Khevsureti and Pshavi.

²According to written sources Christianity here was spread in the 4th-6th cc.

in Moktsevai Kartlisai//The Conversion of Kartli). After this, without the consent of king Vakhtang Ossetians could not use the Dariali Door (Juansher 1955: p. 156)

A number of Georgian historic works tell us that Ovseti (Ossetia) follows Dvaleti and the Kingdom of Kartli; later the kings of united Georgia would connect Ossetia via Dvaleti passage. The coming of Ossetians through the Dvaleti Pass is given in the work of Leonti Mroveli, the 11th-century Georgian historian: “And came to our land the Ossetians warriors, in great numbers, through the Dvaleti pass” (Leonti, 1955: 55). The same Leonti in the other place would write: “And Mirian would go to Ossetia and defeat it and reach the country of Khazars and return home through the Dvaleti Pass” (Leonti, 1955: 68). As we see the same is stated here, how king Mirian campaigns against Ossetia and returns home through the Dvaleti Pass. The same state of things is registered with the author of “Matiane Kartlisai” (resp.: “Kartli Annals”) who when describing the invasion of Bugha Turki (resp.: Bugha al-Kabir) names the “pass-through Dvaeti” that must be the western pass (Chronicle, 1955: 1955: 256).

We encounter the passes of the Caucasus and the Dvals in other sources too; among them, the most authoritative are the statements of the 18th-century Georgian chronicler Vakhushti Bagrationi who personally visited all parts of Georgia, the south and north Caucasus; studied and described the history of the local population of different regions, their traditions, and lifestyle and worked out special maps; he is the one, who is considered to be the founder of the Georgian historiography and geography too. Vakhushti, who had witnessed everything he wrote about when describing the Truso Gorge, names three gorges “the eastern gorge, one in the west of Zakha and Magran-Dvaleti, another in the south Mtiuleti, and the last in the north Kurtauli and all these are surrounded by the Caucasus; the people living there are Ossetians and Dvals” (Vakhushti, 1973: 357). 18th-century historian of the royal court, the monk Egnatashvili also distinguishes Ossetians from the Dvals, who when narrating the historic events of the 14th –century Georgia enumerates the highland peoples that lived in the Caucasian mountains, and in doing so, he names Ossetians and the Dvals separately (Egnatashvili, 1959: 330). These notes show us that Truso is surrounded by the Caucasian mountains and in contrast to the sources of the previous period the composition of the local population is changed; here, from the local, Georgian population, are left only the Dvals, while Ossetians, as a new ethnic group, is added. One part of Ossetian historians question the Georgian origin of the Dvals and regard them as Ossetians (B. Kaloev, etc.) while such authoritative scientists as V. Abaev, N. Volkova, V. Gamrekeli, R. Tofchishvili, V. Itonishvili, B. Gamkrelidze, etc. have vividly verified the Georgian origin of the Dvals³. And what is more, Vakhushti Bagrationi, who had personally traveled and described everything also differentiates Ossetians from the Dvals and considers them to be the different ethnic groups. Who are the Dvals, in reality, is seen from the surnames preserved in the Georgian onomastic. They are scattered all over Georgia and are found in different surnames: Dvalidze, Dvalishvili, Dvali, Dvaliashvili, etc. Toponyms and micro-toponyms introduced by the Dvals who had left Dvaleti can be found in different regions of Georgia (Gamkrelidze, 1988: p.80-100). This is the same Georgian ethnic group as Kakhetian, Guruli, Imereli, Megrelian, Svan, Kartleli, Adjarian, Mokheve, Pshaveli, Khevsurian, etc. the Dvals belong to one of these ethnic groups who

³Summarizing study on the origin of the Dvals see with Topchishvili, 2016.

related to one of the branches of Georgian highlanders that lived at the central Caucasus and who, throughout the centuries had relentlessly been guarding the security of the strategic passes on the Georgian (firstly of Kartli, later the borders of the united Georgian kingdom, and after its collapse the frontiers of Kartl-Kakheti) border. The driving out of the Dvals from the historic Dvaleti and the Truso Gorge must have happened stage by stage.

Part of Dvals relocated to different parts of Georgia due to the raids of Ossetians, the others blended with Ossetians. It is noteworthy that part of the descendants of the relocated Dvals has preserved the memory of their historic region, Dvaleti up to these days (Topchishvili, 2019). The process of blending the Dvals with Ossetians was underway in the Truso Gorge too but not completely due to the tight economic and cultural ties with the lifestyle of Georgians of Khevi and Mtiuleti (East Georgia). And the saving of the Truso Gorge is connected with the persistent struggle, devotion and brave opposition of the Georgian highlanders of East Georgia.

Of course, we are unable to cite all the sources and scientific discussions on the subject as our goal here is to observe Truso as one of the most important strategic regions in the history of Georgian statehood at every stage of its development. Eventually, when the resistance against the Arab domination was on in the 9th -10th centuries and the struggle for gaining the power “over Kartli” among the Georgian political entities, developed into the fighting for the unification of Georgia and ended with the consolidation of the country.

What was the role of the Door of the Caucasus and the Truso Gorge in the defense system of the central power of the united Georgian kingdom?

In the defense system envisaging the country security “from Nicopsis to Darubadnd” established by David the Builder (1089-1125) the Truso Gorge, due to its geopolitical location played an important role in the Central Caucasus and the population of the region was directly subjected to the royal power. The local population was distinguished by their exceptional devotion and trust to the royal authority that conditioned the turning of Tianeti (resp.: mountainous region) of East Georgia and among them the Truso Gorge into a royal domain. Civil and ecclesiastical monuments of that period and historical sources verify that the Dvals and Caucasians were the subjects of the center of the Georgian Catholicate and belonged to the congregation of Nikozi Bishop (Gamkrelidze, 1998).

Beginning from the epoch of David the Builder till the beginning of the invasion of Mongols mountainous population of the Caucasus and political entities would adhere to the principles of the institute of vassalage and subordinate to the union headed by the Georgian state. Naturally, this is the time when grows the strategic and political importance of Truso, as it along with Dvaleti Pass and the Door of the Caucasus was not only the border zone but was an important commercial-economic, political, and cultural pass ensuring the connection of Georgia with the vassal states.

From the beginning of the 14th century, i.e. from the dominance of the Mongols, due to the difficult political, social, and economic state of the Georgian Kingdom, Truso was given to one of the influential Georgia feudals, Ksani Eristavi to rule (Dolidze, 1965: 106). After the weakening of the monarchy of feudal Georgia, part of Georgian tribes, the Dvals living in the central Caucasus would come to Truso from the north fleeing from the constant raids of the Golden Horde. They would come and settle in the Truso and

Mna Gorges. Later, after the collapse of the Georgian Kingdom, and due to the complicated ethnopolitical processes in the North Caucasia and the migration of tribes of various origins, Ossetian elements of Iranian origin come to the Truso Gorge about from the end of the 17th century. Eventually, they gained ethnic domination in the Truso Gorge; the Dvals that stayed there were either blended with Ossetians or were induced to leave the Gorge and relocate into different parts of historic Georgia (Gamkrelidze, 1998: 105).

Despite the fact that Truso was the subject of the king of Georgia and consequently Since the beginning of the 17th century till 1743, the region found itself under the rule of the other influential feudal house, of the Aragvi Eristavi (Egnatashvili, 1959: 399). Since 1743 Kartli and Kakheti kings Teimuraz II and Erkle II deprived the Aragvi Eristavi the right of ownership over Truso and returned it the status of state domain, a principality (Kherkheulidze, 1989: 43).

As the principality, Truso was governed by an official, Mouravi, or a deputy headman. Apart from guarding the borders, their obligations envisaged the collection of taxes and sending warriors in case of war (GNCM, Hd-3906).

Up to the 1st quarter of the 18th century, there is no information about the non-Georgian population in Truso in Georgian and foreign narrative works and historical sources (e.g. XIV-XVcc. "Monument of the Eristavi", "Gergetis Sulta Matiane" ("Annals of Gergeti Souls") belonging to 1439, "Smatavisis samwyos dramisa da Semosavlis wigni" (A book of Samtavro congregation and its revenues", XV c.; Dolidze, 1965: pp. 105-114; Sharashidze, 1954: pp. 246-247; Dolidze, 1970: p. 203).

As we have mentioned above, according to the notes of a famous Georgian historian, Vakhushti Bagrationi, in the first half of the 18th century, there is a blended composition of the population in Truso that are represented in the following way, the locals, the Dvals and the newcomers, i.e. Ossetians; but since the second half of the 18th-century migration of Ossetians received a permanent character. According to Georgian historic documents, sometimes Kartli-Kakheti Kingdom rulers would facilitate the migration of Ossetians to ensure the settlement of the abandoned territories and the improvement of economic conditions. They would have created favorable conditions for the settlement of Ossetians in Georgia, giving the lands under the crops, the houses as well as some food for the new settlers (GNCM, Qd-1617). Thus, it can be said that the kingdom itself facilitated the full integration of Ossetians that lived there into the social-political space of Georgia. Ossetians themselves were well aware and appreciated the support and attention of the Royal court. After the annexation of the Kartli-Kakheti kingdom by Russia in 1801 there were some anti-colonial uprisings and Ossetians would have joined Georgian rebels in the struggle against the Russians. Later, rebellions of Ossetians received a systematic and irreconcilable character (Bendiashvili, etc. 2012: 15-16).

The Guberniya of Georgia was created after the abolition of the Kartli-Kakheti Kingdom by the Russian Empire. Truso, as well as the Khevi, according to the administrative division was included firstly, in Tbilisi Guberniya, but later, in 1802-1803, it was assigned to Dusheti Mazra (resp.: district), from 1803 they belong to Ananuri district, and from 1821 to 1929 it was again in the composition of Dusheti district. In 1840 took place the reorganization of Dusheti district with administrative-territorial division into regions, such as Kazbegi, Dusheti, and Mtskheta. The Truso

Gorge and the Khevi were included in the composition of the Kazbegi region; naturally, from 2005 up to the present it is registered in Kazbegi municipality (GSE, 1979: 605; Georgia, 2012: 519).

The Truso Gorge is empty of the population (there are about 17 deserted villages there). The first massive migration of Ossetians from the gorge started at the end of the 19th century that is registered by the Russian census. (e.g. see 1873 census (CHANAG, fund: 254) on the territory of Georgia remained, though moved towards south to the lowlands; part of them returned to their historic motherland, to Ossetia (Present North Ossetia, Russian Federation). Leaving the Gorge by the population was conditioned by a number of processes: severe climate, the nonexistence of the possibility of employment and education, low level of economic and social development of the region, and subsistence production that finally made the people leave the gorge.

In the second part of the last century, Ossetians who migrated to North Caucasia and would visit the Truso Gorge, the place of their former habitation only during a certain season, namely, from spring to autumn when bringing the cattle for spending summer on pastures there. Though, later, the lack of prospects in the development of sheep breeding resulted in the malfunctioning of this branch of occupation too.

In the second half of the 80th of the 20th century, the movement for national independence that started in Georgia and in some republics of the Soviet Union would cause the enhancement of the soviet propaganda machine in borderline regions of Georgia (Abkhazia, so-called South Ossetia, Truso) where lived the mixed ethnic population. It was coupled with the severe economic crises of 1990s and the failure of the infrastructure that led to the isolation of the Gorge from the central inhabited areas and finally resulted in the migration of the population from there.

The situation even more deteriorated with the 2008 Russian - Georgian war, which was followed by the closure of the Russian-Georgian border (Larsi check-point) and the breaking of diplomatic relations between the states.

You may know that the claims, on the Georgian territories after the Russian aggression of August, 2008, and the occupation of Akhalkalaki, have increased even more. Russian and Ossetian scientists and the press would launch and disseminate the false propaganda and information on this part of Georgia, presenting the Truso Gorge as "ancient Ossetian territory". From time to time, in the Russian language newspapers, we encounter the letters (that are encouraged and supported by the Russians) forged by the Ossetian authors and Ossetian civil organizations (e.g. "Dariali") where they claim that the Truso and Dariali Gorges situated in Kazbegi municipality, as well as the territory of the villages in the Kobi basin, belong to Ossetia and thus should be included in the composition of South Ossetia. Even more, the map published on the website of "Dariali" shows that Gori, Mtskheta, and the Military Road of Georgia are within the borders of South Ossetia. These people completely ignore the interests of the local Georgian population, historical written documents, even the census and documents compiled by Russia, or the legacy of the Georgian population, the epigraphic monuments written in stone that are the collective historic memory and the true evidence of their cultural identity (Gagoshidze, 2021: pp. 129-141; Akhaladze, Shiolashvili, Pkhaladze, Burduli, Kistauri, 2021: 83. 10-13;).

When the Russian empire and other big states talk about the state security issues they should consider that the problems of security primarily stand before the small

nations and thus a violation of the borders of strategic from the defense viewpoint regions, violates the sovereignty of these states. We believe that today when we have already had wonderful examples of a centuries-long history of mutual coexistence, relative ties, and unity, the tension that had been accumulated by the interruption of imperial policy, provokes and fans the flames of distrust between the Georgian and Ossetian peoples, thus creating the atmosphere of all-out disbelief and even more triggering the conflict. These conflicts, apart from all other problems, are the main, guiding axis of Georgian home and foreign policy even today. The pressing character of the topic is enhanced by the facts that display the constant striving of Georgia, the country that gained independence in the 90th of the 20th century, to lead the state policy in accordance with international norms and to solve the foreign policy issues of the country by peaceful resolution of the conflict, to ensure the state security, the integrity of strategically important regions and borders.

Despite the migration processes, Truso, as the old Georgian habitat has preserved basic tendencies of the national culture, first of all: Georgian written culture and Georgian writing in the form of epigraphic monuments, the tower-houses and the backed towers for defense purposes, and many other characteristics mutual for Georgian mountainous regions (Svaneti, Khevsureti, Mtiuleti, Tusheti) and artifacts that are found in Truso; the Truso Gorge, this, as if a remote part of our country and still so close and dear to us with its 17 deserted villages that stand still as the guards and remainders of our history. As if the time has stopped in Truso, neither the Dvals of Georgian origin nor Ossetians live there anymore. One part of Ossetian would have returned to their historical homeland, others would have settled in different regions of Georgia. As for the Dvals, this ethnographic group does not exist, though their family names are still preserved in Georgian onomastics in the form of surnames, the Dvalishvili, the Dvaladze, the Dvali, the Dvaliashvili, the Tuaolodze, etc.

Ossetians that stayed in Georgia, live in different historical regions of the country and are actively involved in its political, economic, and cultural life. They are represented in the state management system, in scientific circles, in sports, business, and other spheres. They participate in the country's defense, represent Georgia at various international meetings and talks, scientific forums, and sporting events and their majority consider Georgia to be their homeland. Frankly speaking, it is rather awkward for Georgians and Ossetians, the descendants of King Tamar and Davit Soslani, Quins of Borena and Bordokhan, the ones who have been tied with the oath of loyalty throughout the centuries and managed to preserve our country overcoming the historical calamities, when today, the third-party lectures us about the necessity of peace.

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