



არქეოლოგია, ეთნოლოგია, ნუმისმატიკა
ARCHEOLOGY, ETHNOLOGY, NUMISMATICS

**The Ancient Farming Cultures in Adjara
(Flax and Hemp)**

Nodar Kakhidze

Doctor of Historical Sciences Chief Scientific Worker of
Niko Berdzenishvili Institute of Batumi Shota Rustaveli State
University Georgia 6010. 32/35 Rustaveli/Ninoshvili st. Batumi
+995593633500. kakhidzenodar@gmail.com
ORCID: 0009-0006-821902668

Abstract

In the introductory part of the article, based on the data of ancient Greek sources (Herodotus, Strabo, Xenophon) and relevant Georgian scientific literature, the cultivation of ancient agricultural crops - flax and hemp in ancient Colchis is discussed. According to these reports, it is clear that ancient Colchis, which included Adjara, was not inferior to Egyptian linen in the production of high-quality linen fabrics, and that is why it was exported abroad, including Hellas. The assumption is made here that the cultivation of flax and hemp in Colchis and the folk technological knowledge and skills of making high-quality fabrics must have been known in Colchis much earlier before the Greek authors of the ancient period knew about it and tried to bring it to Greece.

In the main part of the article, on the basis of ethnographic materials, the cultivation of flax and hemp crops in Adjara and the issues of making yarn and fabrics from its fibers are characterized. According to the same ethnographic materials, it is clear that in Adjara, flax and hemp were grown with more or less intensity, both in lowland and mountainous Adjara, which is clearly indicated by the

corresponding toponymic names, such as Naselvar and Nakanafevi (that means former flax and hemp fields).

From linen yarn, which was called “kedi“, fabrics called canvas were made, which were used for women's and men's clothing. Various types of ropes and household items were made from hemp yarn. From flax seeds, which were called “kumeli” oil was made. It was used both for food and as a means of lighting that replaced kerosene. Flax and hemp seeds were also used for medical purposes.

Ethnographic materials given in the article on the example of Machakhli valley clearly show the special role of women in the production of yarn and various fabrics from flax and hemp fibers. With these materials, a little-known issue is clarified. The bride first was given flax and hemp thread to spin. If she handled the work well, then the work of knitting and weaving would not be difficult for her at all. In choosing a bride this aspect of textile activity was given one of the main importance.

Keywords: flax; hemp; kumeli; flax oil; flax and hemp fabrics.

Introduction

Flax and hemp are the oldest perennial crops for Adjara. Millet, rye, barley, dika (an old Georgian spring wheat type), ghomi, wheat, rice, corn, and others were the old and ancient crops for the region, but the importance of flax and hemp crops in the agricultural life and family life of Adjara is special in that yarn, fabric, clothes, necessary household products, etc. were made from its fibers. It is also acceptable to take into account that linen fabric was used as a shroud for the dead, or, in the words of lexicographer Sul Khan-Saba Orbeliani, “a dead body wrap”. Hence the relevance of the research topic - to show the special importance and role of flax and hemp culture in the life of the population of Adjara.

Review of sources/literature

When writing the article, in its introductory part, the books of Ivane Javakhishvili and ethnographer Leila Molodini were used

("Economic History of Georgia", Book 1. Tbilisi, 1930; "History of the Georgian Nation", Tbilisi, 1960; "From the History of the Material Culture of the Georgian People", Tbilisi, 1963)", in which the reports of the authors of the ancient period (Herodotus, Strabo, Xenophon) and Georgian written sources and relevant scientific literature on the cultivation of flax and hemp and the production of yarn and other products from them are collected and analyzed.

In the main part of the article, on the basis of ethnographic data, the cultivation of flax and hemp culture in Adjara and the production of yarn and fabrics from its fibers, the distillation of edible oil from flax seeds, and the medicinal purpose of flax and hemp seeds are discussed. The materials of this series collected in Adjara enrich and diversify the study of flax and hemp growing traditions throughout Georgia.

Method/Methodology

Historical-comparative and descriptive methods, as well as the complex-intensive work method recognized in ethnographic (ethnological) science, which requires a deep study of the research question in a stationary way in one small or several large regions fixing ethnographic issues in a wide area, are used in the research of the topic. According to this method, it is important to obtain information on the certain research topic from different informants in terms of its scientific analysis and reliability.

Main results of the study

Flax and hemp are the oldest perennial crops in Georgia, about which trustworthy information is preserved in ancient Greek and Georgian sources, in the relevant scientific literature that relies on these sources. Materials collected during field expeditions, including toponymic data, provide important information on the cultivation of flax and hemp crops in Adjara.

After Egypt, Georgia (ancient Kolkheti) is rightfully considered the producer of flax and hemp in the world at that time. According to the reports of ancient Greek writers - Herodotus, Xenophon, Strabo, Colchis linen fabrics, which were not inferior in quality to Egyptian

ones, were produced in such large quantities that they were taken outside the borders of ancient Colchis for sale or exchange. The Colchis tribes used to be dressed in linen cloths and wore knee-length linen robes (Javakhishvili, 1960:30). Based on these reports, it is likely that flax and hemp were grown in ancient Kolkheti from an earlier period than the ancient Greek authors got familiar with.

Here we point out that the famous German scientist Unger's opinion that flax should have been brought to Egypt from Colchis, which was also supported by the famous scientist V. Henny. Scientists De Kandolle and N. Vavilov considered Transcaucasia as one of the homelands of flax culture. (References are taken from the book "History of the Material Culture of the Georgian People" by the Georgian ethnographer Leila Molodini, Tbilisi, 1963:10)

Speaking about the spread of flax and hemp culture in Georgia and the export of its products, mainly high-quality fabrics, it is worth noting the words of the Russian researcher, candidate of chemical sciences I. Mashnikov's hypothesis. It was published in 1987 in the magazine "Vokrug Sveta" under the title "Medea's Secret or Another Version of the Argonauts Campaign", which was also translated into Georgian and published in the newspaper "Akhlagazrda Comunisti" (February 14, 1987).

The article expresses the opinion that the expedition of the Argonauts to ancient Colchis was not so much caused by the abduction of the owner of the "Golden Fleece", but the owner of the secret of the thinnest linen thread. It was a linen cloth that cost a hundred times more than gold and was thinner than a hair. This kind of cloth was considered a real treasure in Hellas.

The author of the article wrote here: "With certain reasoning, we can assume that the finest flax thread is that very golden fleece described in the myth of the Argonauts. The Hellenes prepared an armed ship and the heroes of Hellas for a difficult and dangerous journey in order to bring the fine flax thread from Colchis." According to the author, "in ancient times, there was either a type of flax that is no longer available today, or the ancients possessed some technological

secrets of obtaining ultra-thin flax yarn”. We will also add that in ancient Colchis they grew such a type of flax that ancient Greek authors wrote about, and they also knew how to make high-quality flax yarn.

This is the general picture in ancient Colchis, which included today's Adjara, about the cultivation of flax and hemp, the production of high-quality textiles from them, which were exported from Colchis to distant Greece.

Cultivation of flax and the use of its products continued in Kolkheti even in later centuries. We will give some examples. In the X-XI centuries, the monks of Athos continued to grow flax along with other agricultural crops in the Lavra of Iberia on Mount Athos, according to the “Big Book of the Province of Gurjistan” at the end of the XVI century, a large amount of flax was grown in Samtskhe-Javakheti, Kola-Artaani and other areas. This is indicated by the fact that the population of more than 300 villages included in the mentioned province were billed for up to four thousand cans of flax seeds. According to the reports of 18th century French travelers, Archangelo Lambert and Chardin, a large amount of linen fabrics and seeds were exported from Georgia to Constantinople, Kaffa, Trabzon and other places. According to Jean Murie, five thousand feet of flax seeds were sent abroad from Samegrelo every year (the information is taken from the book named L. Molodini, p. 16).

Before I. Javakhishvili wrote on the basis of De-Morgan's reports that the remains of linen fabric were found in Bronze Age burials in the Caucasus and Georgia. The archeological excavations of the later period confirmed the cultivation and consumption of flax in Georgia in the Eneolithic period as well (Khostaria, 1944:210,212).

One of the advanced regions for the spread of flax and hemp, as ancient farming crops, was Adjara, included in ancient Colchis.

The traditions of growing these crops, making and consuming various products from them, on the basis of relevant parallel materials, are mainly covered in the article according to the materials found during ethnographic expeditions and scientific missions.

Flax and hemp were grown with more or less intensity in almost every village. This is also clearly indicated by the toponymic data under the names of Naselvari and Nakanafevi (the spots where flax and hemp were cultivated). According to incomplete data, in Upper and Lower Adjara, the name of Naselvari is called up to 20 toponyms, and that of Nakanafevi - more than 20 (Sikharulidze, 1958. See searches on flax and hemp).

According to ethnographic materials, flax was used not only for making yarn and other products from it, but also for oil extraction.

Flax was sown in all types of soil, but fertile soil was preferred because it grew tall and provided relatively good fiber material. The fabrics and oilseeds made from it were of better quality.

A separate and sacred crop of flax is not confirmed. It was sown in a cornfield during the second stage of hoeing for corn field. After the corn was harvested, it overwintered in the ground and was harvested in the spring. Corn was sown again in this place. Women's and men's clothes, various things were made from flax yarn. After traffic in the city of Batumi improved and it became possible to purchase fabrics for family needs, accordingly flax crops decreased. It was sown in separate small vegetable plots in the cornfields, which in turn reduced the effort and labor spent on cultivating.

Flax was mostly harvested by hand, rarely cut with a sickle, and the roots were cut with a hatcher to the length of one inch, bound into bunches and taken to the yard to dry. In order not to scatter the seeds, they would harvest the crops after the rainy day. After drying, the seeds were removed from and kept in a special vessel. In some cases, a special cloth bag was also used for this purpose. Flax brought to the yard for yellowing was kept in the shade for 2-3 days and then bound into bunches. According to the materials written down in Machakheli Valley raw flax brought to the yard bound into bunches, was packed for 2-3 days in a danewort (*Sambucus ebulus*) in order to turn it yellow. This was done in the following way: first, they would lay a single layer of danewort and put flax bunches on it. On top of that, they would lay another layer of danewort and stack flax bunches on

top of it again. After that, the flax bunches were dried in the shade and stored in granaries or farm outbuildings. During the winter or other free time, they would begin grading it.

According to the materials recorded in the 60s of the last century in the village of Upper Chkhutuneti of the Machakhli valley (narrator Meriem Kakhidze, 73 years old), the flax stalks were started to separate from the middle, and with the movement of the fingers, the bark (attached fiber) was removed. From the bark of 10 stalks of flax, one knot, i.e. a bundle, was gotten and twisted into a ball, from which they used to make hanging cloth to be woven on the "safekro" (textile loom). Before that, a yarn was washed in warm soapy water to remove dirt. They also dissolved ash in water and dried the yarn in this way. After drying, the yarn became softer and of better quality.

The thread of flax yarn was called kedi, and the cloth was called (tilo) canvas, which was used for various purposes. Upper and lower clothes were made from it, and sometimes pants were also dyed.

The clothing of the deceased was made from linen fabric, which was called shroud. Wrapping the dead body in linen shroud and burying it like that was considered a "merciful deed".

Attention is drawn to the terms "Kedi" and "Tilo", which is an acquisition of the old Georgian textile business. According to the explanation of Sulkhan-Saba Orbeliani, "canvas is treasure of flax and hemp" (Saba, 1949:341). And according to Niko Chubinashvili's definition, "a canvas is a gel or a garment woven from flax and hemp" (Chubinashvili, 1961:376). According to academician Giorgi Chitaya, Georgian canvas (tilo) is related to the word "Tal", which is mentioned in the writings of the 10th century Arab traveler Ibn Hyukal. It states: "The inhabitants of the Black Sea coast were famous for making linen fabrics, which in the local language was called "tal" (Chitaya, 1970:19).

Ethnographic data verified the name of flax seed "Kumeli" and its use for various purposes. So, for example, if there was a shortage of bread, chadis (corn pies) were baked by mixing flax seeds or kumeli with corn flour. Such chadis was soft and could be kept for a long time. Porridge (dough) was also made from kumeli flour, which was used to

treat furunculus. For this purpose, sometimes curds were mixed in the porridge, which contributed to the early healing of the furunculus.

Flax was also used to treat the cow. If she had difficulty in giving birth, the harvested flax bunch was soaked in water, squeezed and the juice was given to the cow to drink.

According to the ethnographic data, one of the important customs related to flax and hemp draws particular attention. In order to master spinning and weaving well, the girl to be married would first be given flax and hemp and said: she will practice on this to get used to, and then it will not be difficult to weave wool and cotton. This was preceded by another rule. For a girl who would spin one spindle, the head woman of the family, first of all the grandmother or mother, would take thread away from the spindle, place it on a piece of clay pan or a clay tile and burn it with ember, saying: she will be talented in everything and "handicraft"/"fancy-work" will not be difficult (narrator Meriem Kakhidze, 73 years old, 1962). The fulfillment of this custom was the practice of weaving for a woman to be married (Kakhidze, 1967:377-378). A similar custom existed in some European countries. For example, such a law was adopted in Norway: if a daughter did not know how to knit, sew, wash and cook, she was not allowed to marry (Newspaper "World of Wonders", 1997, N12).

While collecting ethnographic materials on pastoralism in mountainous Adjara, we did not hear from any of the narrators about distilling edible oil from flax seeds. This is also explained by the fact that mainly butter was made here and there was no demand for linseed oil. Only one case was confirmed about the distillation of linseed oil in the Skhalti valley, which was printed in the newspaper "Fukh-ara" (1926, N227).

Here is an excerpt from this newspaper: "In 1926, during the construction of a road in the Skhalta community of the Skhalta valley, at a distance of 30 fathoms from the old church, a large cut stone was found, which is three arshins long and one arshin wide. This stone caused great surprise among the people. There is 110 years old woman in the Skhalti community, who gave us the following explanation:

“When kerosene was not available, people used to sow flax, take thread from its stalks, and grind the seeds with a stone and extract oil, which was used instead of kerosene. Five horses were spinning the stone”.

This stone is associated with flax-making gelazes, which were common in Samtskhe-Javakheti and Trialeti (Chitaya, “A friend of the monument”, 1970, N20). According to the definition of Sulkhan-Saba Orbeliani, “Gelazi is a oil-distilling” (Sulkhan-Saba Orbeliani, 1949:72).

According to the ethnographic materials, obtained by the ethnographer L. Molodini in the 1950s, in the villages (Maghlakoni, Jocho, Erge, Makhinjauri) of the former Batumi region (today's Khekvachauri municipality), i.e. in Kvemo Adjara, oil was made from flax seeds and used for food.

According to the information recorded in Maglagkon village. Sadzighveli (grinding wheel) was used to crush the flax seed, which was widespread in the lowland and highland of Adjara.

It was a long process to crush the flax with the grinding wheel. Finely crushed flax, which was sprinkled with water, was placed in sacks (so-called torba) made of flax or hemp fabric, tied firmly and placed on a special device - a long wooden bench or a wooden tabo (one of the essential details for making flax oil), on which heavy things (mostly stones) were placed. They even put a plank on top of it. One end of the plank was fixed in one of the walls of the building so that it would not fall out under pressure. At the other end of the pole, two or three men would stand or they would place heavy stones again in this place. From the bag placed on the wooden bench or tabo, the oil was collected from the grooves in a clay vessel placed on the ground nearby.

According to the report of L. Molodini, in the past, sowing flax, making fabrics from it, and distilling linseed oil were massively followed in the villages in the Kakhabri plain, where raw and melted //boiled butter was not produced in the same quantity as in mountainous Adjara, due to the lack of a large number of dairy cattle. Linseed oil was also made in the village of Erge, according to a 100-year-

old narrator, the local family used an average of one and a half to two feet of oil per year (Molodin, 1961:33).

As it was said, along with flax, hemp has been grown in Georgia since ancient times. This was also the case in Adjara, which, along with ethnographic materials, is also evidenced by the corresponding toponyms under the name of Nakanafevi (former hemp field).

This culture was widespread in mountainous Adjara in relatively large quantities and it was mainly used to obtain fiber - thread. Ethnographic materials also confirm the medicinal use of hemp seeds. The seeds were crushed, dissolved in water and drunk in case of stomachache.

Hemp was sown on the edge of gardens and homestead plots on a separate area of 30-40 square meters, or on the edges of farm plots. When the hemp started to turn yellow, then they cut it with a sickle or bill-hook, sometimes they dug it out together with the roots, tied it into bunches, and after drying in the yard, they made it into flat bunches again, bound with hemp bark and dried first in the shade and then in the sun. Before sorting out, they would wet it in the rain and start sorting it.

Hemp bark was used for various purposes. According to the ethnographic materials recorded in the Machakheli valley, they used hemp thread to weave sacks, honey strainer bags, ropes for dragging loads and tying cattle in the feeding rack. Hemp was also used to make ropes for weaving looms, skis, saddles, yoke fixing pegs, harnesses for kalamani (bast sandals) (Kakhidze, 1967:377).

Conclusion

Thus, according to ethnographic materials, it is clear that even in Adjara, which was a part of ancient Colchis, the cultivation of ancient farming crops - flax and hemp - was mainly due to its fiber for making clothes and various products for family life. And from flax seeds, which was called kumeli, oil was made, which was used for both, food and lighting. It was also used for medicinal purposes together with hemp seeds.

According to ethnographic materials, the participation of women was great along with men in the cultivation of flax and hemp and the production of various products from them. The young women to be married had to know how to make yarn from flax and hemp. That was of crucial importance in engaging her as a bridegroom. The ethnographic materials collected in Adjara enrich the traditions of cultivation and consumption of flax and hemp throughout Georgia with new similar and different data on the traditions of making various products from flax and hemp.

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