



**1704 Ottoman document about Batumi surroundings
(ethnographic aspects)**

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Abstract

Ottoman records compiled for the purpose of tax collection serve as a crucial source for studying the history, economy, and social conditions of southwestern Georgia during the early 18th century. These records, particularly the “Extensive Record of Batumi Liva” and the “Brief Record of Batumi Liva”, provide valuable insights into grain cultivation practices in the Adjara region. The earliest of these documents dates to 1704, offering a detailed account of agricultural production and its economic implications.

The second document contains records from various periods. According to these records, the Batumi Liva encompassed the present-day city and its surroundings, extending along the Chorokhi Valley to Borchkha and southwest to the Black Sea coast in Lazistan. The document provides a detailed list of villages along with their respective taxes, such as those levied on gruel, corn, and other goods. The aim of our research is to analyse these references from an ethnological perspective.

In the past, cereal crops occupied a vast area within Georgian settlements. Significant accounts of their cultivation are found in ancient Georgian sources, the records of foreign travellers and scientists in Georgia, as well as in the lists of church and monastic beggars from the late 16th and 17th–18th centuries. According to Ottoman sources, gruel cultivation was widespread in Adjara prior to the introduction of maize into agricultural practices. Since then, it has remained one of the population's primary food grains. This study compiles ethnographic information on the cultivation and processing of gruel, its varieties, culinary uses, and associated rituals, integrating these findings with topographical and archaeological data.

Keywords: gruel; Adjara; Chamuri; husking.

Introduction

Information about the population of Georgia, their customs, and way of life has been accumulating for decades. Interest in the Georgian people arose for various reasons, prompting travellers, merchants, military personnel, and government officials to document aspects of their lifestyle, beliefs, social norms, housing, clothing, food, production methods, and economic relations. Ethnographic data related to farming practices, in particular, provide valuable insights into the social conditions of the population.

Georgia is one of the world's most significant centers for the earliest farming and herding communities. In the past, cereal crops occupied vast areas within Georgian settlements. Important information about their cultivation and distribution is found in ancient Georgian sources, accounts by foreign travellers and scientists, and the lists of church and monastic taxes from the 16th to 18th centuries. The Venetian merchant and diplomat Iosafat Barbaro, who visited Georgia in the 1470s, noted in his writings about Batumi that, aside from gruel, no other crops were brought to the area (Baramidze, 2023:246). Regarding grain cultivation in Adjara, Ottoman records such as the

„Extensive Records of Batumi Liva” and “Short Records of Batumi Liva” provide valuable references. The former dates back to 1704 (Shashikadze, 2024:11), while the latter comprises texts compiled during different periods (Shashikadze, 2024:20). According to Records, the Batumi Liva encompasses the territory of the present-day city and its surroundings, extending along the Chorokhi Valley to Borchkha and southwest to the Black Sea coast in Lazistan (Shashikadze, 2023:10). The document lists villages and details various taxes, such as those on gruel, corn, and other crops (Shashikadze, 2024:11; see also Shashikadze, 2024). The purpose of our research is to analyse the references described in this document from an ethnological perspective. This study focuses specifically on gruel culture, a widely cultivated crop in Western Georgia both before and after the introduction of corn. Gruel has long been one of the population’s staple grains. The research compiles ethnographic information on the cultivation and processing of gruel, its varieties, culinary uses, and associated rituals, aligning these findings with topographical and archaeological data.

Review of Literature/Sources

Ethnographic records, particularly archival materials preserved in the ethnographic collections of the BSU Niko Berdzenishvili Institute, form the primary knowledge base for researching grain crops in Adjara. The study draws on the works of notable scholars such as Niko Ketskhoveli, Vakhtang Shamiladze, Vladimer Mgeladze, Nugzar Mgeladze, Nejat Chijavadze, Nodar Kakhidze, Mikheil Kamadadze, Izo Samsonia, and Otar Turmanidze. Additionally, European and Ottoman sources provide critical insights into the topic. Despite the availability of these materials, no comprehensive ethnographic research on gruel culture in Adjara has been conducted to date. This study seeks to address that gap.

Methodology

The research was conducted through an in-depth review of specialized literature and sources. The study employed direct observation and survey methods, which were cross-referenced with archival

documents, toponymic data, and archaeological findings. Through meetings and interviews with the local population, a number of intangible ethnological elements related to gruel culture were uncovered. These include the cultivation and processing of gruel, its culinary applications, household customs, and associated rituals. These traditions and practices are deeply connected to the historical daily life of the population in Adjara.

Discussion (Main Results)

In 1703 (or 1704, according to some sources), the Ottoman army invaded Imereti, conquering and subjugating Guria as well. Following this invasion, Batumi was seized by the Turks. Prior to this, Batumi and its surrounding areas, including villages north of the Chorokhi River, frequently changed hands between Gurieli rulers and the Ottomans. Gonio, however, had been under Ottoman control since the mid-16th century and served as the administrative center of the Sanjak, known as the Sanjak of Batumi or Gonio (Shashikadze, 2024:9).

For studying the history, economic, and social conditions of the Adjara region in the first quarter of the 18th century, the extensive and short records of the Batumi Liva provide valuable information. These documents describe villages located on the outskirts of the city, including details about households and the various taxes imposed on them. Villages were required to pay specific taxes on gruel, corn, shira, and wedding fees (Shashikadze, 2014:11).

According to the census, villages such as Akhalsheni, Sameba, Korolistavi, Agara, Kapreshumi, Makhinjauri, Erge, Jocho, Khelvac-hauri, Todogauri, Kibe, Kapnistavi, and others were taxed on gruel (Shashikadze, 2024:23-26). This indicates that gruel was one of the main staples of the local population.

In Samegrelo and Guria, gruel was widely used, as evidenced by numerous ethnological studies and written sources. However, there has been no comprehensive research on the intensive use of this food in Adjara. The present paper aims to address this gap.

The widespread distribution of gruel is supported by field ethnographic materials recorded by researcher Nejat Chijavadze in 1958-59. For example, in the village of Akhaldaba (Shuakhevi Municipality), the upper village was referred to as Naghovari because “ghomi” (gruel) was traditionally sown there (narrator: Mukhamed Ismail Zoidze, 80) (Materials, 2019:43). In another area of the village, known as Sajakeli, there was a water well where locals used to gather and dance (Chala village, Shuakhevi Municipality; narrator: Akhmed Yusuf Beridze, 63) (Materials, 2019:56). The fertility of the land was emphasized by some narrators: “We used to sow corn and gruel in the highlands. We harvested 30 Godors (baskets) of corn and 5 Godors of gruel, and we washed the gruel using a water Chamuri” (a place to grind grains) (narrator: Aziz Ali Mikeladze, 90) (Materials, 2019:57). Another account notes the discovery of an ancient memorial stone (chamuri) in a field, which is still in use today (narrator: Dursun Yusuf Amaglobeli, 75, Nagvarevi, Shuakhevi Municipality) (Materials, 2019:57). “The peasantry used to sow barley and rye because the corn harvest was often poor. Rye, gruel, barley, and other crops were common” (Memed Yusuf Nagervadze, 75, Zeda Chkhutuneti, Khelvachauri Municipality). “Among the cereal crops grown, rye, barley, gruel, wheat, flax, and hemp were the most widespread, with bread crops being less common. Bekhri Khinkiladze of Chikuneti village (Khelvachauri Municipality) recalls historical yields: “293 poods of corn, 4 poods of rye, and 2-3 poods of gruel” (Materials, 2019:101). Gruel was typically sown in remote fields or high-altitude patches. The “Machakhlura” variety of gruel had a single, unbranched head, while another type featured small branches. Near households, plots known as Bagcha. In ancient times, they were called “Manor” where they sowed crops like corn, barley, and gruel. If corn failed to grow in a plot, gruel and other grains were sown instead (Maniaketi village, 1959) (Materials, 2019:103). They had Kishlebi (summer pastures) on “Nakervali”, Mt. Shkernali, when this area was Georgia, at that time they plowed wheat and gruel here, they sowed wheat in the low places, and millet in the fields (Mgeladzeebi,

Khulo) (Materials..., 2019:122). Old people would say that if there was no corn before, people would sow millet, bread and barley (Riketi, Khulo) (Materials..., 2019:123). Barley was also sown..., before the introduction of corn culture, it was mainly rye and gruel. Gruel was used in the same way as rice is used today. They also made porridge from it (narrator, Omar Dolidze, 84, Khasan Turmanidze, 88, Merisi, Keda) (Materials..., 2019:131).

In ancient times, they sowed corn, wheat, bread, barley, rye, millet, flax... There were two types of gruel, which differed from each other.

80 years ago, they had the following tillage: Napudzari, 80 poods of corn was grown. Akhlokanebi - 50 poods of corn was grown, 30 poods of wheat, 20 poods of barley. A total of 120 poods of corn, 40 poods of wheat, and 30 poods of barley was grown to Naslavghele. Corn and gruel were sown on the farm. 50 poods of corn and 6 poods of gruel were grown there.

150 poods of corn was grown in Bardnari, 60 poods of corn in Verkhvni and 8 Chviri (load) of flax. 50 poods of corn was grown in Zvanti, 40 poods of corn, 18 poods of rye - in Koriati, 30 poods of corn, 8 poods of rye - in Tskhemlikedi, 85 poods of corn, 8 poods of gruel - in Akhlokane (narrator Daut Haji Diasamidze, 76, Zendidi, Keda, 1959) (Materials..., 2019:135-136).

The heads of the gruel were husked into a millstone, which was driven by foot. Gruel, rye, barley, etc. were sown in order to help corn, since the harvest was small. Mustafa Diasamidze used to grow corn, rye, gruel, etc. (Maradidi).

Two types of gruels were common in Chakhati and its surroundings: "Borchkha gruel" and "Batsara gruel". The head of the Batsara gruel was elongated, whole, and cluster-like. It yielded a good harvest, even in poor soil in the highlands. On the other hand, "Borchkha gruel" was a late-maturing variety, thriving on fertile pastures in the plains. It featured a large stem, a tall body, and a branched head. Gruel was sown using two methods: scattering and hoeing. After

sprouting, the fields required weeding to clean the crop from grass. The crop was hoed twice during its growth. Sowing took place after March 20, once the soil had warmed sufficiently. Harvesting was performed by cutting the heads with a knife. In larger fields, the straw was cut using a machete before the heads were removed. The harvested heads were then spread on the ceiling of the hearth to dry. The straw was utilized for covering water sources (narrator: Mikheil Khasan Suknishvili, Chakhati, 1960) (Materials..., 2019:139).

Among the cereal crops, apart from seven-week maize, rye, millet, rice, corn and bread, the cultivation of wheat, which was of several varieties, was common. These included “Batsara”, “White”, “Single-headed”, and “Late-harvest”. Gruel was typically sown in plots where corn yielded separate harvests. One variety, “Jashura gruel” (or “Jashi gruel”), had reddish grains and a large head, and it was sown in batches. “Bojga gruel” was reddish in colour and headless, often grown on soil of medium fertility. Among these varieties, “Batsara gruel” was fluffier and more productive. The sowing methods included scattering and hoeing, followed by two rounds of weeding. Harvesting was performed using a “Mangali” (a cutting tool), after which the heads were cut off with a knife. To speed up the drying process, the harvested heads were sometimes heated over a fire or hung on sticks made from hazelnut pulp. Once dried, the “gruel” was stored in a ventilated room before being placed in sacks made of hemp and then transferred to barns for preservation. If needed, dried “gruel” was husked in a “Chamuri” (a husking device). Foot-operated “Chamuris” were common in the village (narrators: Ali Shakarishvili, Aslan Katamadze, 72, Varjanauli village) (Materials..., 2019:166-68).

Those who had a Chamuri in their yard were considered wealthy. In the old days, if mediators were sent to propose marriage on behalf of a man, the woman's parents would say, "We can marry our daughter to that man; he owns Chamuri" (Materials..., 2019:229).

My grandfather used to say that while nothing is sown across the village now, in his youth they used to sow bread there, though

eventually, they stopped. Although we didn't sow it ourselves, people also cultivated barley and gruel here (narrator: Ibraim Chaghalidze, 75, Intskirveti village, Shuakhevi municipality; recorder: Vakhtang Shamiladze).

For as long as I can remember, we used to sow bread, corn, barley and gruel here. We planted bread and corn alternately. (Narrator: Mehrali Kipiani, 80, Shuakhevi municipality, Zemo Khevi village. Recorded by Vakhtang Shamiladze).

In the old days, bread, corn, barley, gruel, rye, flax and others were sown in this village (narrator: Khasan Turmanidze, Sikhalidzebi, Keda municipality, 43, recorder Vakhtang Shamiladze, 1959) (Materials., 2019:142).

Here we sowed corn, hemp, flax (for clothes), wheat (less), barley and others. We would usually sow barley in a fertile place. There will be no harvest on a lean ground. We also sowed gruel, but very little in the outdoor field. We boiled gruel in milk and ate it like that (narrator: Ermile Dumbadze, 83, Kuchula village, Keda municipality. Recorded by Vakhtang Shamiladze, 1959).

In our village, in the old days, we used to sow corn, barley, wheat, tobacco, and occasionally gruel, rye, flax, and other crops. Gruel was sown in fields where a forest had recently been felled; we burned the cut branches and planted gruel in that area. It wasn't worth sowing elsewhere, nor was it possible, as it wouldn't yield a harvest. During the corn weeding period, we also weeded gruel, but only by hand, which was essential. We harvested the gruel crop in Autumn during corn harvesting. We would throw it directly into the barn and later, at the right time, sow it in the Chamuri. I don't remember the exact type of gruel it was, but we used to call it "long-headed gruel" (narrator: Abuladze Kazim, 60, Ortsva village, Keda; recorder: Vakhtang Shamiladze, 1959).

We did not hesitate to cut down forests to create fertile land. Freshly cut and burned fields were ideal for sowing gruel. It thrived on burnt wood ash as fertilizer and did not respond well to other types of

fertilizers. For this reason, we always sowed gruel for the first time on such freshly burned soil (narrator: Kakhidze Osman, Lower Chkcutuneti, Khelvachauri district; recorder: Vakhtang Shamiladze, 1959).

Gruel was sown in various places. In the field, they sowed corn for the first three years. In the fields here, a kind of small grass grows that resembles gruel. This grass was plucked by hand, and then gruel was sown. If the grass remains, the gruel will not survive" (Narrator: Iliia Diasamidze, 68, Maradid, recorded by: Vakhtang Shamiladze, 1959).

In ancient times, we used to store flour and other products in chests and cupboards. Millet was sown in our village, as corn did not grow here. Even today, the remnants of that millet continue to grow in the fields. Later, corn (tsvitai), wheat or real bread, rye, gruel, and other grains were introduced. Every family had both a barn and a storage room for grains. Bread, corn, and barley were kept in the barn. Raw corn would be stored in the Nalia or Tura barn, and after it was dried, we would move it to the main barn." (Narrator: Suleiman Memed Datunaishvili, 60, Kechieti village). (Materials..., 2019:155).

Until Muhajirdom it was a narrow strip of land where all the fields had been cultivated, and livestock breeding was minimal. The area was later expanded by Muhajirdom. Even today, there are roads in the village flanked by stone pits, so narrow that it was difficult for a horse to pass through. All the fields were surrounded by stones. Many people from this region traveled to Kakhaveri to work in the fields, and from here, many people died in Kakhaveri from the plague (Narrator: Osman Kakhidze, 70, Chkcutuneti. Recorded by Vakhtang Shamiladze, 1964. (Materials..., 2019: 194).

Few ethnographic materials about rye, millet, and gruel have been preserved, but toponymic material has survived (Menteshashvili, 1937:111,148,153). A number of toponyms related to gruel (Ghomi) have been confirmed in Adjara (Sikharulidze, 1958, 1960). Ghomelauri in Tsantskalashvilebi village (Kamadadze, 1998:138), Naghomari mountain, Naghomvari vineyard in Tskhemla (Kamadadze, 1998:134),

Naghomi River, Chamuri head-reservoir in Shuakhevi village (Kamadadze, 1998:133), Naghomari forest (Ketauri (Kamadadze, 1998:128)), Ghompuri-arable land in Kedlebi village (Kamadadze, 1998:127), Naghomvari field (Kilavri (Kamadadze, 1998:127)), Ghomisdziri (Arable land (Kamadadze, 1998:122)), Naghomvari (arable) Takidzeebi (Kamadadze, 1998:120), Naghomari sowing field in the village of Skhepi (Kamadadze, 1998:119), Naghomari plowing (Zhanivri (Kamadadze, 1998:115)), Nachamurebi Mountain (Oladauri (Kamadadze, 1998:113)), Ghomikari plowing (Nigazeuli (Kamadadze, 1998:112)), Naghomardebi mowing fields (Karapeti (Kamadadze, 1998:101)), Naghomvari mowing fields (Intskirveti (Kamadadze, 1998:99), mowing fields (Vani, Gomarduli (Kamadadze, 1998:84-94)).

Ethnographer Nodar Kakhidze recorded more than 30 toponyms related to grain culture during his expedition in Upper Machakhela, including Napetvari, Naghomari and others (Kakhidze, 2013:69; Kakhidze, 2020:50, 53, 59, 66, 68, 72). The culture of gruel is mainly related to Akhooba for the authenticity of the valley. In the newly cleared but burnt areas, in the first year, in most cases, they sowed gruel, and from the second year, it turned into a corn field. Common varieties of gruel were early red and late white gruel. There was a special dish called Olve for drying the head of gruel. They were knitting it with a rod. Ethnographic materials prove that in the Machakhela valley, there were only foot mills, which the local population calls Sadzigveli, for husking gruel. As a complex weapon, it is more common in Georgia. Husking the gruel and working on the loom was a woman's job. In the past, there was rarely a family, or several families of the same surname, that did not have its own Sadzigveli (Kakhidze, 1974:38).

In Adjara, gruel was also used in rituals. According to old narrators, in ancient times, grains of wheat, barley, rice, and corn were thrown on the queen in Lazeti (Tandilava, 1972: 125). It was also used in folk medicine (Surmanidze, 1974: 34).

The spread of gruel in Adjara is also supported by archaeological evidence. For example, charred grains of wheat and gruel were found in the V layer of the Namcheduri settlement (XIII-XII centuries BC), suggesting that gruel played a significant role in the diet of the local population (Kakhutaishvili, 1995: 56, 57; Japaridze, 2007: 160). Archaeological findings also indicate that cultivated grains were harvested and stored in clay pots, *dergis*, and cloth bags. Some of the clay vessels discovered at Jargvali, a fire pit in the Namcheduri settlement, contained carbonized grains of gruel, and both gruel and wheat heads were charred alongside the structure's roof. Grain processing, according to archaeological data, was done by a hand grinder. The resulting product was likely used to prepare cakes, and it is also possible that it was consumed in a boiled form. Ceramic pans for making cakes were found in Namcheduri, Bobokvati, Tsikhisdziri (Kakhutaishvili, 2007: 188).

The use of gruel has been recorded in the highlands of Adjara. Archaeological findings from Chvana indicate that gruel production was widespread in the farming practices of the middle zone of Adjara. It is well-represented in the study of ancient archaeological sites across Western Georgia (Mamuladze, 1993: 150).

As for the foot mills, also known as *Chamuri*, they have been identified in East and South Asia, Poland, Salzburg, Bern, Hungary, Italy, and Northern Spain. European scholars suggest that, in this context, Georgia serves primarily as a transmission link between the West and the East. However, the analysis of Georgian, South Caucasian, and pre-Asian foot mills highlights Georgia's significant role in the origin of these cultural traditions (Chitaia, 2001: 46, 47).

The cultivation of gruel in western Georgia declined after the spread of maize. However, in 1926, it was still grown on 22 hectares in Adjara, yielding a harvest of 7 tons (Turmanidze, 2009: 374).

Conclusions

Ottoman registers compiled for tax collection provide valuable insights into the history, economy, and social conditions of the Batumi

region during the first quarter of the 18th century. Specifically, the information in the “Extensive Book of Batumi Liva” and the “Short Book of Batumi Liva”, both of which contain important data on grain cultivation in Adjara, is of great significance. The first document dates back to 1704, while the second includes records from various periods. According to these documents, villages such as Akhalsheni, Sameba, Korolistavi, Agara, Kapreshumi, Makhinjauri, Erge, Jocho, Khelvac-hauri, Todogauri, Kibe, Kapnistavi, and others were taxed for the use of gruel. It appears that gruel was one of the primary food sources for the population. Archaeological evidence shows that gruel cultivation in Adjara dates back to the 13th-12th centuries BC, and it was a staple food product. Ethnographic studies further highlight the widespread use of gruel, not only as food but also in rituals and folk medicine.

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