

Lightning, sacrifice and possession in the traditional religions of the Caucasus.

Kevin Tuite
Université de Montréal

Introduction.

On a crisp morning in late July 1996, the chief priest Ioseb K'oč'lišvili explained to me how the stone shrine to K'op'ala came to be built at Iremtk'alo. For those accustomed to places of worship erected by central squares or other convenient locations, the choice of this site would seem perverse, if not masochistic. The meadow known as Iremtk'alo, "the deer's threshing ground", is situated at 2225 metres altitude, atop a mountain overlooking the village Shuapxo in the highland province of Pshavi in northeast Georgia. Those who attend the annual summer festival at Iremtk'alo, for the most part members of the Udzilaurta clan, must hike uphill for at least three hours from the nearest village, if they go on foot (as most did until very recently). Iremtk'alo is barren of trees, and far from the nearest spring or river. All water and firewood must be hauled up by people or pack animals. The same goes for the food, except for that which makes the ascent under its own power: dozens of sheep and several bulls, which will meet their deaths at Ioseb K'oč'lišvili's hands in the course of the day. It was on the spot where the shrine now stands, K'oč'lišvili explains, that the hero K'op'ala bested the strongest of the ogres (*devebi*) in a boulder-throwing competition. These ogres were huge, powerful and terrifying to behold. Some were said to have nine heads. When they walked, their feet sank into the ground as though they were wading through drifted snow. The champion among the ogres picked up a massive boulder and threw it from the mountaintop. It sailed across the river below, a branch of the Aragvi, and landed on the other side. K'oč'lišvili gestured to the spot where the stone came to earth, perhaps a half-kilometre downward and over a kilometre to the west of where we stood. K'op'ala picked up an even larger rock, hefted it, and thought it too light. So he took another boulder, pressed it against the first as though packing two snowballs together, and let it fly. The giant rock would have fallen short of its mark, however, had not the deity K'viria intervened. He struck the airborne rock with his whip, so that it flew further than the rock thrown by the ogre, and landed on a fortress built by the ogres at Cixetgori. Ioseb K'oč'lišvili pointed to the site of Cixetgori, on the mountainside across the river. The day before, he prayed there and offered sacrifices. The ogres were defeated in combat by K'op'ala and his companion Iaqsar. Those that survived took refuge underground, leaving the land free for people to settle there and live peacefully. That is why K'oč'lišvili's ancestors built the shrine at Iremtk'alo, and that is why the Udzilaurta clan gathers there in mid-summer each year, to offer livestock, bread and beer at the site of K'op'ala's victory.

The reader will doubtless have concluded by now that K'op'ala, K'viria and the ogres never actually existed, at least not as described, and will perhaps have classified K'oč'lišvili's narrative as a legend, folktale or myth. K'op'ala himself might be labelled a "hero", or perhaps — as the object of a cult — a "deity" or "god". In the pages to follow, there will be frequent mention of "gods", "deities", "divinities" and "spirits". In some cases these words translate fairly precisely the terms chosen by the priests, oracles, healers and others, whose narratives constitute much of the empirical basis for this study. Quite often, however, writers adopting the stance of objective observers are responsible for these designations. Charachidzé [1981b] refers to K'op'ala as a

“dieu”, employing the French lexeme also applied to the Supreme Deity. I know of no instance of a Georgian mountaineer utilising the closest Georgian equivalent (ymerti) with reference to K’op’ala; they prefer to qualify him as a “hero” (gmiri) or “child of God” (xvtisšvili). There has been, to be sure, much speculation about what these terms mean. How does a society imagine its “god” or “gods”? With what classes of beings are they in contrast? How is the concept of god employed as a tool of thought? What representations underlie, or motivate, activities such as prayer and sacrifice, which seem to be forms of communication or exchange with god(s)? To what degree can the god(s) of one society be usefully compared with those of another, especially where the communities in question participate in distinct cultural areas, or are characterized by different politico-economic orders? For the purposes of this paper, the term “god” will serve to index a mode of *speaking about* (or *to*) individuals named in texts. The texts may be classified — by outside observers, not necessarily by those who produce them — as songs, hymns, myths, ballads and so forth. To the referents I label “gods” are attributed ways of manifesting their presence, communicating or interacting with people, or influencing the state of affairs in the experienced world which are depicted as significantly different from those of humans. In the cases to be studied here, “gods” are ascribed such characteristics as invisibility (under ordinary circumstances) and immortality. They reside in spaces separate from those inhabited by humans, and ordinarily off limits to the latter. Speech acts in which they are attributed the role of addressee are qualitatively different from communicative acts between humans. One could say that discursive genres describing gods or addressed to them play a major role, in conjunction with ritual and the uses of space, in constituting them as a cultural category. I make no claims, though, that all members of a given social group talk about gods in the same way, to say nothing of how they might *think* about them. (Indeed, there is abundant evidence from the Caucasus that “god-related” discursive practices of men differ in significant ways from those of women; likewise the practices of ritual specialists differ from those of other members of the community). In certain respects my usage of the terms “god” and “deity” will parallel that of the ethnographers who works will cited throughout the paper, in that it will represent my interpretation of the phenomena being described, rather than the actual labels used by native speakers. Where the original texts contain a particular lexeme which serves to denote a unique, supreme deity (e.g. Georgian ymerti, which is never pluralized in ordinary usage), I will employ “God”, with an initial capital, as its English equivalent.

The first section of the paper will consist primarily of the description of one such genre of discursive practice, a song traditionally performed while dancing around the body of a lightning-strike victim, in which the name of one or another god is uttered, along with the mysterious vocable čoppa or cop(p)ay. Data concerning the čoppa ritual will be framed in an analysis of the representations of possession, sacrifice and, in general, the appropriation of people or animals by divine beings in traditional Caucasian religious thought. We will return to K’op’ala in subsequent sections of the paper, where certain features of the religious thought of the Pshavs and Xevsurs of the northeast Georgian highlands will be compared and contrasted with those of the peoples of the West Caucasus.

I. Ethnographic data on the choppa ritual.

In his *History of the Caucasian Albanians*, the Armenian historian Movses Dasxuranc‘i makes passing reference to the “royal graves of the thunder-č‘op‘ayk’” as being among the idols and sacred objects burnt by the so-called Huns (*Honk‘* or *Honastank‘*) of the North Caucasus upon their conversion to Christianity, an event said to have taken place in the late 7th century.¹ In his notes to the English translation of this passage, Dowsett (pp 165-6) links the lexeme č‘op‘ay to coppay, the name of an Ossetic “ceremonial dance around a victim struck by lightning, a refrain sung at the burial of the same, and a rite at the time of drought”, citing the Ossetic dictionaries of Miller and Abaev. Dowsett’s gloss refers to the description, a few pages earlier in Dasxuranc‘i’s text, of some “satanically deluded errors” symptomatic of the Huns’ alleged “northern dull-witted stupidity”, among which is the belief that “if flashes of thundering fiery lightning and ethereal fire struck a man or some material object, they considered him or it to be some sort of sacrifice to a god K‘u(w)ar” [*Hist. Cauc. Alb.*: 155-6]. Dowsett’s conjecture has recently been cited by Golden [1998] in the context of a study of the religious beliefs of the medieval Qipchags. Golden points out supporting evidence from ethnographic accounts of rituals and sacrifices in honor of the lightning and fertility deity Choppa (also known as Elliri Choppa) among the Balkars and Karachays of the northwest Caucasus, modern descendents of the Qipchags.

Besides the Ossetes and Karachay-Balkars, other peoples of the West Caucasus performed, up to the beginning of the past century at least, round dances around the body of a person or animal struck by lightning, during which the vocable čoppa or cop(p)ay is repeatedly sung. Such ceremonies have been described for the Abkhazians [Akaba 1984] and Kabardians [Kantaria 1964, 1982]. In the song texts, čoppa or its variant is juxtaposed to the words ældar (variants elari, atlar) and Elia (var. Iliia), of which the former means “lord” or “prince” in Ossetic [Abaev 1949: 63-64], and the latter derives from the name of the prophet Elijah, whose associations with rain and lightning in East European folklore are well known [Ivanov/Toporov 1974; Ivanov 1991]. Unlike these two words, čoppa and its variants are an enigma. The ethnographic accounts invariably mention the semantic opacity of the name of the ritual. In this section I will examine the ethnographic data concerning the Ossetic, Kabardian, Abkhaz and Karachay-Balkar čoppa rituals. At the end of the paper a possible source of the puzzling čoppa lexeme will also be discussed.

¹ The Caucasian “Huns” were “most probably” Turkic-speaking in the opinion of Golden [1980: 90-93, 259-261; 1992; pers. comm. 5 April 2000], although the paucity of linguistic remnants militates against any firm conclusion. According to Fedorov [1972], the state of Suvar, which flourished in northeast Daghestan to the north of Derbent, in the 6th-8th centuries, was ruled by the “Huns”. Archeological evidence indicates consolidation in Suvar between steppe Turkic and indigenous populations, a process also attested by the medieval descriptions of “Hunnic” religion. Whereas the cult of a chief deity named Tengri-khan is clearly of Turkic origin, the “tree worship” and certain funerary observances described by Dasxuranc‘i are attributed by Fedorov to the Daghestanian tribes of highland Suvar [1972: 23-24].

I. 1. OSSETIC COPPAY.

The traveller Stöder was in Digor Ossetia in 1781 when “a powerful thunderbolt killed a young woman. After the strike those who came upon her cried out in joy, and began to sing and dance around the dead body. All residents of the village joined in the dancing circle, showing no concern that the lightning continued to flash. Their single, simple refrain was «O, Elia, Elia! Ældari coppay». They danced a round dance in synchrony with the words, sometimes in this, sometimes in reverse order, as one person sang out and the chorus took up the refrain. They dressed the dead girl in new clothes, laid her in the same spot and in the same position as when she was killed, and sang without interruption until night. Her parents, sisters and husband danced, sang and seemed as happy as if it were some festival. Grieving faces were considered a sin against Elijah. This celebration lasted 8 days. They had a youth who had been hit by lightning brought here. All those struck by lightning who survived became servants and messengers of Elijah. Even livestock that was struck by lightning was set free. The young man sang and danced in a circle, then fell and began beating himself convulsively. Between convulsions he became alert and with open eyes recounted what he had seen in the company of Elijah, and named previous lightning victims who were at Elijah’s side. Then he transmitted Elijah’s orders concerning the dead. The most significant was the command to keep a fire burning 8 days around the body and abstain from all work and industry. The dead girl was placed in a coffin set atop a platform for 8 days. On the 8th day they put her on a new oxcart, which a pair of oxen with white spots were to pull. Young people along with the relatives of the victim went in procession to neighboring villages, singing and collecting gifts of livestock and other food products. The gifts were for the victim, or the festivities, or for her relatives. The coffin was finally set on the cart, to which the oxen were harnessed, and they pulled it where they willed; the victim was to be buried at the spot where they stopped. This time the oxen stopped at the nearest grass. Straightaway they laid out a rectangle of stones to a height of a couple feet, set the coffin on it and placed stones around and upon it, making a mound about two meters high. Next to this heap of stones they set up a pole with the stretched skin of a goat and its head. Alongside it was a smaller pole on which they hung the best clothing of the deceased, then by the tomb they consumed together the gifts of food that they had gathered. The livestock of the victim were set free on the steppes. These animals were marked, so that if one of them approached the shepherds, it was driven away again” (transl. fr. Russian version in Abaev 1958: 314-5).

I have quoted this passage in full to introduce the reader to the ritual, and also because this text includes most of the important details for which parallels have been noted in other descriptions of the ritual. Another early attestation, originally published by Gatiev in 1876 and translated by Dumézil [1978: 67-69], also mentions the practice of villagers gathering around the victim and singing “a nearly incomprehensible song, the coppay”, during which all known previous lightning-strike victims are commemorated. The villagers keep vigil for three days around the body, in hopes that Wacilla [= St. Ilija (Elijah)] will revive the victim. The body is then buried on the spot, although the close relatives remain there for another three days, to dig the victim out in case Wacilla brings him or her back to life. Should the rainstorm continue longer than expected, or another person fall victim to a thunderbolt, the body is dug up, set on a cart drawn by unguided oxen, and reburied at the spot where the oxen stop. On the anniversary of the death, the family of the deceased offers a communal feast by the burial site, called *ærvdzavdy kuvd* “banquet of the thunderstruck”. Mention

is also made of two poles from which is hung the head and skin of a sacrificed goat, in the description of the ritual performed should the victim survive. The poles are planted on the spot where the bolt was believed to have touched ground, and the sacrifice is repeated at the site each year by the family. Finally, Abaev specifies that the coppay dance could also be performed in times of drought to cause rain [op. cit.].

I. 2. KABARDIAN COP'AY

The Kabardian cop'ay ritual has been described in detail by Medea Kantaria [1964: 87-89, 1982: 208-220], a Georgian ethnographer who has done fieldwork on Kabardian agricultural practices. The ritual is directed to the traditional thunder-lightning deity Shyble, sometimes represented in the form of a fiery serpent, who is invoked in prayers for rain, prosperity, and a good harvest. Should a person be slain by a thunderbolt, no signs of mourning were permitted; the survivors “consoled themselves with the knowledge that Shyble had brought good fortune to their family by his touch”. They poured milk on the spot of the accident; milk was also used to put out a fire caused by lightning.² The womenfolk performed a round dance in honor of Shyble over 7 days, while singing a song to this deity including the refrain : “cop'ai, elari, ilia” (elari < Ossetic Ældar, perhaps via Georgian; ilia = Elijah). The menfolk, meanwhile, sacrificed a grey goat and hung its skin on a pole, where it remained throughout the 7 days of the ceremony. All present must partake of the meat from the sacrifice. Most of Kantaria's sources could not ascribe any meaning to the vocable cop'ay in the refrain. Some, however, equated it with the Khantseguashe [hancə-g'a:śa] “shovel-lady”, a fetish used in rain-making rituals. The object in question is a sort of mannequin made by affixing women's clothing to a shovel. Women brought it to the riverbank, planted it there, and splashed each other with water; the menfolk meanwhile slaughtered a goat or sheep and prayed for rain. Its efficacy could be enhanced by hanging the hearth-chain of a lightning-strike victim around its 'neck'; rain could also be provoked by pouring water over the chain. In general, special powers were ascribed to objects linked to the lightning-strike victim. This was particularly the case for stones from the gravesite, “to which properties of Shyble were transferred”, especially the property of making rain. In times of drought, “they went to the victim's grave reciting prayers”, accompanied by members of the bereaved family. The grave stone was pried open and propped up with a rock “while the victim's relative prayed that the deceased would intercede with Shyble to bring rain”.

I. 3. ABKHAZIAN ATLAR-CHOPA

In a brief report of the results of a field trip to Abkhazia, Abaev [1949: 316, 319] compared Ossetic (Ældary) Coppay to Abkhaz Atlar-Chopa, a similar ritual and song performed around the body of lightning-strike victims (human or animal) [Inal-Ipa 1965: 531-533]. As described by Akaba [1984: 74-75], the ceremony is accompanied by the construction of a wooden platform (aš'əmk'át), on which is placed the meat of a sacrificed goat. The unfinished meat was left on the platform, and nearby a pole was erected on which the skin of the goat was hung; both meat and skin remained until they rotted away. In some variants of the ritual, songs were sung in honor of the lightning-god

² This parallels the practice, noted by ethnographers in Ossetia a century ago, of washing the legs of a lightning victim in milk, and then splashing milk on the spot where the victim was buried [Basilov & Kobychiev 1976: 152].

Afə (*af-r-áš°a*) or Airg´ (= St. George; *ayerg´-áš°a*).³ In one early-19th c. description, it was the victim's body which was left atop the platform, until complete decomposition. Should the person survive, he or she was laid upon the platform, built to a height of 1 to 1.5 meters from nut-tree wood. The participants wore white and danced around the victim singing the Atlar-Chopa, without showing signs of distress.⁴ A well-fed white goat was sacrificed. It was widely believed that the survivor of a thunderbolt strike received supernatural powers, and was considered a prophet. In one account from the 1870's, cited by Akaba, the Atlar-Chopa was sung in alternation between an elderly priest and the other participants. The priest sang the words "Oy, atla čopa", to which the chorus responded "Oy, očou-para!". Then the elder sang "Atla čoupa Temurgvara", to which the response was "Vosa amara!" [op. cit, 75]. According to X. Xorosani, the original source for this description, Temurgvara was the name of a deity, "represented by the Abkhazians in the form of a white-haired old man, riding a winged horse, the thumping of whose powerful hooves produced thunder, while lightning flashed from the rider's bared sword". The origin of the name is obscure; the description, however, fits Wacilla, the Ossetic Elijah, who likewise spreads lightning and thunder when riding his mighty steed [Kaloiev 1971: 245].⁵

The Atlar-Chopa ceremony was also performed as a cure for the mental illness known in Abkhaz as *aršášra* "boiling", with symptoms similar to St-Vitus-Dance — fever, convulsions — and affecting mostly women.⁶ The sick person is treated with conciliation; in Akaba's words "every whim and desire of the patient must be satisfied" [Akaba 1984: 71]. Family members, wearing brightly-colored clothing and avoiding all outward display of grief, maintain a day and night vigil at her bedside. Should there be a death in the neighborhood, no mourning is performed and the burial takes place quickly. In order to rid the patient of the illness, a ceremony is performed in the forest, in which only men participate (except for the sick person herself). The participants light wax candles in honor of the chief god Antswa (*anc°á rc°ašizk° anáxa*), and perform the Atlar-chopa round dance, accompanied by the singing of that song, or the "song of Antswa" (*anc°á-r-aš°a*).⁷ A platform is erected, upon which nut-tree leaves are spread. A year-old goat is sacrificed, and its meat set on the platform, along with strips of white fabric. The patient, dressed in white, kneels before the platform while a celebrant prays to the chief god to send down health to her. The patient is escorted back to the village, whereas the other participants remain at the site, feast on the sacrificed meat, bread and polenta (they are forbidden to drink wine, however). Any remaining food is left in the forest; under no circumstances must it be brought back to the village. In some parts of Abzhui Abkhazia, the curing ritual is performed in the church of St. George at Ilor, especially on the

³ According to M. Mak'alatia [1979: 65-66], the *ayerg´-áš°a* was also enacted by shepherds around a bonfire during mountain rainstorms (perhaps to protect their flocks from lightning?).

⁴ The closely-related Abaza people likewise did not mourn lightning-strike victims [Pershits 1989: 224].

⁵ Another variant of the song, performed when moving an animal struck by lightning, includes the refrain "Vay et'lar! Aytar et'lar! Et'lar čophar" [Javaxishvili 1960: 122-3]. "Aytar" is the name of a seven-fold agricultural deity, comprising the divine patrons of bovines, caprids, horses, dogs, millet and the sun and moon [Bgazhba 1991]. Abxaz "Aytar" is probably related to the name of the Mingrelian livestock deity Zhini (= "upper, celestial") Antar, described further on.

⁶ This disorder is believed to have been sent as punishment for non-observance of the interdiction of work on certain days of the week (such non-working days are known elsewhere in the Caucasus as well). Indeed, some Abkhaz families believe that their non-working days (*amššar*) were the days on which an ancestor was killed by lightning [Akaba 1967: 34].

⁷ Like Afə, Antswa is portrayed as a maker of thunder and lightning, which he (she? they? — the gender, even the number, of this divine personage is a subject of debate among ethnologists!) uses to pursue demons [Akaba 1991].

feastday of its patron saint (23 April, O. S.). A sheep is sacrificed in lieu of a goat; it is also believed that there should be lightning, thunder and rain on that day. According to Inal-Ipa [1965: 532-533], mental derangement and some other illnesses were attributed by Abkhazians to “visits” by the lightning-god Afə to particular households. In order to know how to deal with the problem, recourse was had to a seer (ac’aaŋ’ə), usually female, who had already been visited by Afə, and in whom “a higher power was present”. In the case examined by Inal-Ipa, the seer recommended the sacrifice of a white goat. The ceremony took place on a hilltop. The meat of the goat was cooked while a hymn to the deity was song three times, then it was set on a sort of small platform, covered with alder branches, by the legs of the patient. With the other participants in a half-circle around her, the seer cried out: “Great lord Afə! Today, having slaughtered a spotless goat and done all that is possible, we serve you. And I, unworthy one, ask you to release her whom you deigned to visit”.

Akaba classifies the Atlar-Chopa with a handful of seldom-performed Abkhazian rituals which likewise took place by an aš’əmk’at (platform) erected in the forest, far from the village. One of these is a ceremony performed every 3-5 years at Eastertime in honor of the supreme god Antswa (anc’ə rñəxara). In addition to a sacrificed lamb or goat eaten on the spot, the remaining meat of which could not be brought back to the village, other livestock was released into the forest [Akaba 1967: 40-41; 1984: 69-71].⁸ Only men from the local kingroup were allowed to participate. Less is known, unfortunately, about another, more secret forest ritual performed but once every 20-30 years for a supernatural being known only by the tantalizing description “the one who knows us but whom we cannot know” [hara hazdərua, hara iahzəmdərua].

I. 4. KARACHAY CHOPPA.

In the traditional religious system of the Turkic-speaking Karachays, Choppa “is the name of a fertility deity of thunder and lightning ... Considered second to Teyri in importance, there was an annual spring holiday in his honor and sacred rocks (čoppaŋi taši) were associated with him. It has also been suggested that the cult of Elijah became identified with him (Elliri choppa). The etymology of this term is unclear” [Golden 1998: 210-1]. The čoppa ritual, featuring the sacrifice of a goat, the stretching of its skin on a pole, and the performance of a round dance around stones upon which the meat was placed, was enacted on a number of occasions related to weather phenomena, agriculture and an individual’s life cycle [Karaketov 1995]. It was performed around victims of lightning strike or mental illness, on the occasion of the first thunder of the year, and before beginning important agricultural tasks (harvest, threshing, etc.). The ceremony could also mark childbirth, marriage or funerals. The deity Choppa was the second-in-command and active principle in earthly affairs, representing the distant sky god Teyri (< Tengri, the name of the Altaic sky god).

I. 5. THE “CHOPPA COMPLEX”

To conclude this opening section, I will summarize the principal features of the “choppa complex” as presented in the accounts cited above:

(a) *Lightning strike as fortunate event.* Most variants mention that the lightning-strike victim’s

⁸ Akaba adds that this ceremony “is now only performed for women afflicted with chorea” [1967: 40-41].

family regarded (or were expected to act as though they regarded) the event as fortunate, or as a sign of divine election. Mourning and displays of grief were forbidden, for fear of provoking the anger of the lightning god. White or brightly-colored clothing was to be worn, rather than the black appropriate to a funeral. Thunderstruck victims who survived were considered prophets in the service of the deity who struck them.

(b) *Platform*. Most variants also specify that a platform was erected on the spot of the accident, made of the wood of certain trees (hazel, walnut, alder) and covered with leaves and branches from the same type of tree. Inal-Ipa [1965: 547-8] and Charachidzé [1981a] conjecture that the setting of the victim's body on a platform "évoque les pratiques funéraires que plusieurs auteurs de l'Antiquité ont décrites chez les habitants de la Colchide [= modern-day Abkhazia and Mingrelia, more or less — KT] ... D'après Apollonios de Rhodes, au III^e siècle av. J.-C., les Colques tenaient pour impie de brûler ou d'inhumer les corps des défunts masculins. Ils les enveloppaient d'une peau de boeuf non tannée et les fixaient en haut d'un arbre avec des cordes". Travellers to Abkhazia as recently as the 17th and 18th centuries noted the practice of attaching the bodies of men to the branches of trees, whereas the bodies of women were buried. (Even now, women's bodies are buried several inches deeper than men's [Benet 1974: 88]). A visitor to Circassia in the 15th century noted that victims of lightning strike were considered sacred, and their bodies were hung from trees for three days, while dances and sacrifices were performed; similar practices were described in Abkhazia [Inal-Ipa 1965: 548; 1971: 32-34].

(c) *Body of deceased and sacrifice left in forest*. Among the Ossetes of the late 19th century "wherever a mountaineer might die, he was buried in the clan cemetery or mausoleum; they would attempt to obtain the bodies of those who died away from their homeland or in captivity ... either through ransom or even the exchange of living persons for them, in order that they might be buried in their own cemeteries" [Kaloiev 1989: 146]. A similar belief in the capital importance of burial in one's family burial ground was shared by the Caucasian peoples to the east and west of Ossetia. It is all the more striking then, that the Ossetes expressly *forbade* that the corpses of lightning-strike victims be buried in the village cemetery, for fear of offending Wacilla [Kaloiev 1971: 245]. The victims' bodies were buried on the spot of their death, or at a place chosen by the deity acting through unguided oxen yoked to a cart carrying the body. This taboo on re-entering the space of the village extended to beasts as well. Animals struck by lightning, if they survived, were driven away into the wilderness. This was also done to the herds belonging to a lightning-strike victim, which in addition were marked so that shepherds would not mistakenly incorporate them back into their flocks. The meat of sacrificed animals was to be eaten on the spot; any leftovers had to be left behind in the forest. In some cases it was specified that the uneaten meat was left on the wooden platform, whereas the head and skin of the sacrifice was hung from a pole planted in the ground nearby. In some variants, there is the additional "sacrifice" of livestock released into the forest. Presumably these unfortunate beasts would end up as dinner for wolves or other predators. Several ethnographic descriptions emphasize the interdiction on bringing the sacrificed meat back into the village. These practices reveal, first, the parallel treatment of the victims of a thunderbolt and the animals sacrificed subsequently; secondly, the sharp distinction between the domesticated space of the village and its immediate surroundings (fields and pastures), and those areas beyond it

[Charachidzé 1968; Tuite 1998, 1999].⁹ The victims touched by the lightning god could not be brought back into the profane space of the village because they were too “sacred” in both ancient senses of the word — consecrated to a deity, and charged with a dangerous force which puts them off-limits to humans [Benveniste 1969: 187-192].

(d) *Goat sacrifice*. In those accounts specifying the type of animal to be sacrificed, either on the occasion of a person or animal struck by a thunderbolt, or in general to appease the anger of the storm god, the preferred offering is a goat. In the context of those traditional Caucasian religious systems for which we have sufficient evidence concerning the differential use of sacrificed animals — most notably those of Abkhazia and Ossetia¹⁰ — the goat is offered to powerful, potentially dangerous supernatural beings. While the animal chosen for sacrifice at most ceremonial occasions is a sheep, cow or bull, goats are offered to those which are particularly prone to punitive action, or who behave in unpredictable ways. At the same time, Abkhazian and Ossetian evidence points to a degree of extension of the high symbolic value attributed to wild caprids — ibex and mountain goats — to their domestic cousins. The Ossetes sacrificed goats on such solemn occasions as the resolution of a blood feud or a ceremony atop one of their holy mountains [Basilov & Kobychév 1976: 153-154]. The Abkhazian writer D. Gulia ascribed a veritable “goat cult” to his ancestors, noting the image of a goat on the medieval Abkhazian flag [Inal-Ipa 1965: 207], and the practice of slaughtering a goat rather than a sheep or bull when receiving an honored guest.¹¹ He also specified that a castrated goat (ašt’á) was offered “to avoid the anger of powerful gods” [Gulia 1928: 288]. Goat sacrifices, often performed far from the village, were intended to appease such redoubtable supernaturals as Š’as’á, god of blacksmiths, “golden Zaxsan”, bringer of smallpox, the lightning-god Afá, regarded by Gulia as “the highest of all gods” [1928: 287], and the supreme deity Antswa. It is important to note that the Abkhazians of a century ago believed that “one and the same god might be good or evil in relation to a given person, depending on whether that individual accurately fulfilled his or her obligations to the god. The only way to behave toward an angry god is sincere repentance and sacrifice” [N. S. Janashia, cited by Gulia 1928: 287]. The sacrifice called for in such circumstances is a goat.

(e) *Round dance*. In the traditional cultures of the peoples of the Caucasus, as in many other regions of Eurasia, solemn occasions are marked by round dancing. The Circassian dance *udž*, performed by Kabardian women on the spot of a lightning strike, is described as an “ancient round dance with slow, solemn music”, performed on such occasions as weddings, celebrations of victory in battle, and religious ceremonies [Shu 1964]. Much of the mythological poetry of highland Georgia (Pkhovi and Svaneti in particular) was sung while dancing in a circle, or while circumambulating a shrine [Charachidzé 1968: 703-712; Tuite 1994: 140-144]. Major ‘pagan’ festivals are punctuated by round dances, especially at the end of the day’s festivities, when the

⁹ In some provinces of the Caucasus (notably Pkhovi in the east, Abkhazia in the west), the principal sanctuaries of clan or tribal deities are themselves located outside the village, which some Pkhovian informants attribute to the deity’s avoidance of the numerous sources of impurity in the human community [K’ik’nadze 1996; ms.].

¹⁰ For reasons which become clear later, the sacrificial practices of Northeast Georgian traditional religion will not be considered at this juncture.

¹¹ Domestic goats were by far the most numerous animals in the herds of the Abkhazians up through the 19th century [Inal-Ipa 1965: 206].

participants leave the shrine complex (usually situated some distance from the village), and begin to make their way homeward.¹²

(f) *Rain-making*. The choppa ritual and its variants may also be performed in the hope of causing rain in times of drought, or, conversely, to ward off damage from excessive rain or hail. This implies an equation of the supernatural being causing lightning with that responsible for storms, rain and hail, and a representation of the ritual as being intended to induce a potentially harmful deity to behave in ways helpful to the community.¹³

(g) *Mental illness and prophecy*. Several descriptions associate the choppa complex with the gift of prophecy, and with temporary or chronic mental derangement. On the one hand, survivors of a lightning strike are said to acquire the capacity to convey messages from the lightning god to the human community. The last fortune-teller (*dašni*) of the Ossetian village Lesgor, who died in the early 20th century, began his service after being struck by lightning no less than three times and surviving [Basilov & Kobychév 1976: 138]. Some of these messengers, such as the young man summoned to the scene of a lightning death in Stöder's account, undergo convulsions while prophesying. On the other hand, in Abkhazia and Chegem Karachaya, the choppa ritual is prescribed as a treatment for St. Vitus dance and similar disorders, marked by compulsive, uncontrolled body movements [Karaketov 1995: 45]. In Ossetic, as Abaev notes in his entry under the word *coppaj*, the word is employed in expressions denoting agitation or aimless motion: *coppaj kænyn* "shatatsja tuda-sjuda" (stagger, sway, loaf about); *dywwærdæm coppaj kænyn* "taskaetsja tuda-sjuda" (walk with difficulty, drag o.s. along); *coppaj-wæredæs kænuncæ* "naxodjatsja v sumjatice, dvizhenii" (be in turmoil, in movement).¹⁴ Studies of indigenous Caucasian ethnomedicine [Mindadze 1981] have pointed to a distinction between those illnesses caused by physical causes or injuries, and those attributed to the action of gods, spirits or demons. Among the latter are those disorders reflecting the possession of the victim by a spirit, including certain psychic illnesses and also diseases such as smallpox. There is thus a fine line between the appropriation of a human by a spirit in order to exploit the former as a mouthpiece for the latter, and the possession of that person as punishment or as sacrifice. Regardless of the cause, the afflicted person — or

¹² One well-known example from Georgian folklore where a round dance is performed in commemoration of a person's death is in the Svan-language ballad of Betgil, traditionally sung while dancing a solemn round dance known as the *samti č'əšxæš* [Virsaladze 1976: 113-114; Charachidzé 1986: 159-163]. The ballad tells the story of Betgil, a legendary hunter, who chased a white deer or ibex into the mountains, whereupon it suddenly turned into the goddess Dæl (Dali), divine patroness of horned game animals. She accused him of violating a promise he had made to her, and caused him to fall to his death from the mountaintop. Each year the communes of Mulakh and Muzhal perform the *samti č'əšxæš* on the spot where Betgil is said to have died, in order to bring rain. It may be possible to uncover deeper connections between the Betgil cycle and the choppa complex, but that attempt will not be undertaken here.

¹³ The 18th-century "Description of the Kingdom of Georgia" by Vaxushti Bagrationi includes a brief account of the invocation of Wacilla [*vačil*] by the Duals, an Ossetic-speaking population dwelling in north-central Georgia: "they sacrifice a goat and eat the meat themselves, whereas they stretch the skin on a tall pole and worship Elia, that Elia not send hail upon them and give them the fruits of the earth" [*Kartlis cxovreba* IV: 638-9]. Similar ceremonies in honor of Elia, featuring a goat sacrifice and the hanging of its skin from a pole, and performed to protect crops from hail or excessive rain, have been described for the west Georgian provinces of Rach'a, Guria, Imereti and Mingrelia; and also for the northeast province Xevsureti [Mak'alatia 1987: 83; Ruxadze 1999: 97-107]. None of these accounts, however, mention "choppa" or its variants, either as the name of a round dance or as a vocable in a song.

¹⁴ In Karachay, the lumbering gait of a bear is described as *čoppu, čoppu ète ajlanady* "čoppu delaja xodit" [Karaketov 1995: 226].

rather the spirit residing within him or her — is treated with cautious solicitude. It was mentioned earlier that no one was to show signs of distress in the presence of a patient suffering from aršəšra, and that her desires were to be complied with. Young victims of smallpox, measles and other contagious childhood diseases received similar treatment in lowland Georgia and in Ossetia, since this disease was attributed to possession by spirits (referred to in Georgian by the euphemistic bat'onebi “the lords”). The children and their indwelling tormentors were entertained with songs, feasting, bright colors and decorations, in the hope that the “lords” would be persuaded to leave the children unharmed [Charachidzé 1987: 48-60; Tuite 1994: 131-2; Mindadze 2000]. As in the case of lightning strike, the Ossetes did not mourn for victims of smallpox, for fear of antagonizing Alardy, their smallpox god, imagined as a sky-dwelling deity who descends on a silver ladder to scatter death and disfigurement. Alardy is associated with St. John the Baptist (Oss. Fydwān, Fyd Iwān) [Kaloev 1971: 254-5; Testen 2000], a figure who takes on many of the same functions as Elijah in the folk Christianity of Eastern Europe.¹⁵

(h) *Profile of deities invoked.* When a deity is invoked in the performance of the choppa ritual, it is in most cases one of the local avatars of Elijah (Iliā, Elia, Wac-illa); other names mentioned include Abkhaz Afə and Circassian Shyble, who are likewise gods of lightning, thunder and storms. Akaba mentions similar rituals being performed in honor of the chief Abkhaz deity Antswa, as well as the shadowy “one who knows us but whom we cannot know”. These are powerful deities, who assure the prosperity of the community by sending down life-giving rain, but whose thunderbolts can wreak death and destruction. Those struck by their bolts, however, are not so much punished as *appropriated*: those who survive enter the god’s service as prophets, those who succumb are believed to be in the deity’s company in the afterlife. The tree-burial practiced by the ancient Colchians and their Abkhazian descendants, as well as the setting of victims on wooden platforms, appears to have been a means of separating the victims from the earth and placing them closer to the sky, with the goal of enabling the celestial deity to appropriate their souls into his service in the afterlife.¹⁶

The Abkhaz and Rach’an (Georgian) descriptions mention the invocation of two local “St.

¹⁵ Alardy is from Georgian Alaverdi, the name of an important East Georgian cathedral dedicated to John the Baptist. Up to about a century ago, one Ingush community located near Ossetian territory, observed a festival in honor of a deity named Geal-erdy, whose name is believed to derive from that of Ossetic Alardy. Unlike the latter, however, Geal-erdy was invoked for a wide range of protective functions essentially overlapping those ascribed by the Ossetes to Wacilla. In a prayer cited by Kaloev [1989: 150], he is asked “to protect [us] from hail, lightning, wind; do not render our labor useless”. Representations of smallpox in traditional Transcaucasian folk medicine manifest important parallels to those of lightning strike. According to accounts cited by Mindadze in her recent PhD thesis [2000: 230-255], the disease-bringing bat'onebi dwell in heaven, “in God’s garden”, were created by him (ymertis gamošobilebi), and are sent down to earth at his command. Death from smallpox was considered a blessed event: the victim was thought to have been “taken by angels” [angelozebma c'aiq'vanes]. According to one informant from the west Georgian province of Lechxumi, a child taken by the “lords” “goes to paradise, is an angel, and will be with the angels” [bat'onebit rom gak'etdeba, samotxeši midis, angelozia, da angelozebtan ikneba]. The victim’s coffin is painted red and sprinkled with roses; mourning is forbidden, and women perform the “Iavnana”, a lullaby-like song believed to bring pleasure to the bat'onebi [for the text of one of these songs, see Tuite 1994: 62-65]. The belief that smallpox, unlike other diseases, was sent by God, and that death from smallpox was in some respect a fortunate event, has been noted in Russia and in the folk-medical traditions of many other European countries. Of particular interest is the invocation of St. Barbara — in Georgia, Hungary, Greece, Austria and elsewhere — to intercede with God to cure the sick child [Bleichsteiner 1954; Bardavelidze 1941b]. I hope to explore the smallpox complex in greater detail in future work.

¹⁶ Whereas the bodies of men were suspended from trees in earlier times, those of women were consigned to the earth, and perhaps thereby into the possession of a chthonic god or goddess.

Georges”, Airg’ [a-jirg’ < *a-g’erg’ < **a-giorgi] and Giorgi respectively. In Mountain Rach’a, people prayed to Elia for rain in times of drought, whereas Giorgi was invoked to protect crops from hail. That is, the storm god Elia was asked to release one of the elements under his control for the benefit of the village, whereas Giorgi’s function was conceived as primarily defensive: warding off a natural element already released by its patron. (Interestingly, Elia is sometimes represented by Georgians as a well-intentioned but blind spirit incapable of seeing where the hail he scatters will fall [Chikovani 1972: 255]). The contrast between Elia and Giorgi is in fact consistent with the functions of his equivalents elsewhere in traditional Georgian culture, a point to which we will return later.

II. Lightning strike, sacrifice and possession. Some comparative evidence.

As an unpredictable, dangerous, fire- and sometimes death-bringing bolt from the sky, lightning is featured in the religious thought of many peoples the world over. In some cases, however, quite similar clusters of beliefs appear to have arisen independently of the choppa complex, of which I will cite one example here. The Nuer people of the Sudan, according to the description of their religious system by Evans-Pritchard [1956: 52-62], believed that the souls of persons struck by lightning or lost in a whirlwind were “taken by God into the sky” and transformed into spirits known as colwic. Some lightning victims came to be regarded as tutelary spirits of their father’s or husband’s lineages, and as such were called on for aid against enemies. To be slain by lightning was a sign of divine election: “When a person is killed by lightning, Nuer are resigned ... The death is not a punishment for some fault but a mysterious act of divine will ... In the case of a colwic, God has chosen a particular person for himself, and taken him with his own hand. Nuer say that the chosen person has entered into kinship, or friendship, with God”.¹⁷ As in the western Caucasus, the victim does not receive an ordinary burial. He or she is interred in a funeral mound with a shrine-stake in middle, on which the head, hooves, entrails and some of the skin of a sacrificed black ox are suspended. The sacrifice is said to assure that the soul of the colwic remains in the sky and does not return bringing misfortune and death to the survivors.

Closer to the Caucasus — sufficiently close and sufficiently connected by pathways of cultural contact that common origin cannot be ruled out — are Greece and the Balto-Slavic region. There is evidence from ancient texts that the Greeks considered the spot where lightning struck [ene:lúision] as ábaton “not to be trodden [by profane feet]” or ápsausta “untouchable, sacred”, and the victim killed by a thunderbolt as “tabu, vom Gott ausgezeichnet, dem normalen Menschendasein entrückt” [Burkert 1961; cp. Cook 1965 II: 21-22]. In other words, such a person became hierós — which like Latin sacer means both “holy” and “taboo” —, as was said of the body of Kapaneus, struck down by Zeus at the walls of Thebes [Euripides *Suppliants*, 935].¹⁸ The hero

¹⁷ Similarly, the neighboring Shilluk and Dinka tribes do not mourn persons killed by lightning, as their deaths are considered an honor.

¹⁸ Textual evidence indicates that in ancient Greece, as in the West Caucasus, the bodies of those killed by lightning were buried at the place of death, or left on the spot uncremated, the area being fenced off (indeed, Plutarch believed that their corpses would not decay, nor would dogs or birds touch “the bodies of those who have been struck by Zeus”) [Cook 1965 II: 22-23]. Some lightning victims may have subsequently been accorded the status of heroes, as implied by the inscription Dii Katabáte:i hé:ro:i Epikrátej (to a certain Epikrates, “vom Blitz erschlagen und deshalb heroisiert”) [Nilsson 1941 I: 63-65]. Among the ancient Hittites, according to Haas [1994: 183-4], “durch Blitzschlag zu sterben galt als ein besonderer, vom Wettergott herbeigeführten Tod, der heilige Scheu hervorrief”.

Herakles was elevated to the status of an Olympian immortal after a thunderbolt thrown by his father Zeus onto his funeral pyre burnt away his mortal parts [Cook 1965 II: 23-29; Nagy 1990: 139-141]. In former times Lithuanians believed that those struck by lightning from a thunderstorm heading west died as favorites of God, whereas those killed by a thunderstorm heading east died on account of their sins [Mannhardt *Letto-Preussische Götterlehre*, p. 538, cited by Nagy 1990: 197]. Among the Slavs “a person or tree struck by lightning was regarded as being filled with health-giving powers” [Gimbutas 1971: 166].

Let us consider these facts in the context of anthropological theories of sacrifice and possession. According to one of the most widely-cited definitions, proposed a century ago by the French sociologists Hubert and Mauss, sacrifice serves to establish “une communication entre le monde sacré et le monde profane par l’intermédiaire d’une victime détruite au cours d’une cérémonie” [1899/1968: 302]. Although more recent investigations of sacrifice have emphasized other aspects of the practice, such as the nature of the exchange between gods and humans, or have attempted to elucidate the meanings symbolized by the offering, the ritual, the context of performance, and so forth,¹⁹ I will focus here on some implications of the sacrifice-as-communication view. In a study of possession cults in Africa, Zempléni [1987] noted that Hubert and Mauss’ definition could apply equally well to spirit possession. Many studies of the latter phenomenon have noted that the possessed individual is conceived as a site of contact between the supernatural and human realms, whether or not he or she serves as a spokesperson for the possessing spirit. Zempléni goes further, emphasizing, in his review of the ethnographic data, the suppression of the possessed’s human personality in favor of that of the spirit, which dwells within the victim’s body, makes her physically and/or mentally ill, feeds off her blood and flesh, even rides her like a horse [op. cit.: 285]. The victims become “des êtres sacrificiels «mis à mort» répétitivement par leur invisible «époux» ou «cavalier» auquel elles sont irrévocablement liées”; the possessed person’s trances, induced periodically during religious ceremonies “sont des *oblations rituelles et réitérées de sa personne au dieu auquel il a été voué*” [op. cit., 312; italics in original]. Without in any way denying the validity of Zempléni’s conclusions, I would like to point out another characteristic shared by sacrifice and possession, which seems particularly useful for the Caucasian materials examined here. It is well known that many descriptions of sacrifice represent it as a *division* of the victim into two portions, one of which is appropriated by the god(s), the other of which remains in the possession of the human participants. Some such accounts, such as the Hesiodic myth of the institution of sacrifice by Prometheus, specify the division of the visible parts of the offering between the two parties; that part given to the gods may be burnt, spilt (e.g. blood) or left uneaten. In some cultures, such as that of the Nuers, it is primarily the invisible portion of the sacrifice, the animal’s life, which is believed to be taken by the god, whereas the carcass remains for the use of the sacrificers [Evans-Pritchard 1956: 214]. Cultures also differ concerning the imagined role of the two parties in the act of division. In Hesiod’s account, the inaugural partition of the victim is made before the gods take their part; in traditional Hawaiian sacrifice, by contrast, the god is thought to “devour” and incorporate the entire offering, then return a portion to the sacrificers [Valeri 1985:

The burials of such victims were handled by a special “Mann des Wettergottes”, who then performed a propitiatory offering of a goat [op. cit., 217].

¹⁹ Cp. Valeri [1985: 70-71] on sacrifice as “symbolic action”.

71]. In at least some folk theories of possession, I argue here, the possessed is likewise divided into two portions, one of which is appropriated — temporarily or permanently — by the spirit, whereas the rest is considered to be still in the “ownership” of the person involved. This appropriation can take the form of exploiting the possessed as a mouthpiece, or as mental or physical illness. Some of the African cases discussed by Zempléni describe the indwelling spirit as a sort of parasite, consuming the victim’s flesh and blood from within. In a Wolof ceremony described by the same author, a possessed woman holds a goat or cow against her body, with the intention of inducing the spirit to quit her body and enter that of the animal, which is subsequently killed. One victim is substituted for another; furthermore, the animal victim is killed, yielding it (or a portion of it) definitively to the spirit.

It is my belief that the Caucasian ethnographic materials presented above yield evidence of a conception of sacrifice, possession and lightning death as fundamentally the same order of phenomenon, that is, the total or partial appropriation of an animal or person by a supernatural being, which may use the former for his or her purposes. Consider first the numerous parallels in the conception of the lightning victim and that of a sacrificed animal. In one of the oldest sources quoted above, Movses Dasxuranc‘i attributed to the Huns the belief that if lightning “struck a man or some material object, they considered him or it to be some sort of sacrifice to a god K‘u(w)ar” [Hist. Cauc. Alb: 155-6]. In the modern variants of the choppa ceremony as well, the victim’s body and that of the animal slaughtered in the ritual are treated in similar fashion. Both may be placed upon the platform, and both must be left behind after the participants return home: the uneaten goat meat is left to rot or be eaten by birds, the victim’s body is buried on the spot or at a location chosen at random. By no means may the meat be brought back to the village, or the victim’s corpse be buried in the village cemetery. In other words, both the remains of the victim slain by lightning and the uneaten portions of the animal slaughtered by the participants in the ritual were regarded as having been appropriated by the lightning god. As in ancient Greece, the fact of having been appropriated by a powerful and potentially dangerous deity rendered the victims *ápsausta* “untouchable, sacred”, off limits to the human community. It should also be mentioned that the Hunnic and modern choppa ceremonies were performed for livestock and objects, as well as people, hit by lightning, implying that it was the act of appropriation of the victim by the god which was the criterial factor: it was as though the god took the initiative of seizing an offering, rather than waiting for the community to perform a sacrifice in his honor.

The final piece of evidence to be considered in this section is chronologically the earliest. In a passage cited by Charachidzé [1981b] as proof that possession was known in some areas of the Caucasus 2000 years ago, the Greek geographer Strabo [*Geography* XI, 4, 7] describes the religious practices at one of the chief sanctuaries of the Caucasian Albanians (*Albanoí*, dwelling in what is now Azerbaijan) as follows:

“As for gods, they adore the Sun, Zeus and Selene (= the moon), most of all, the moon. Its sanctuary is located near Iberia (= a kingdom in eastern Georgia — KT). The officiating priest is most revered after the king. He has authority over the sacred territory, which, like that of the king, is large and well-populated, and also over the servants of the temple, of whom many go into trances

and prophecy [*kai tō:n hierodoúlo:n, hō:n enthousiō:si polloì kai prophe:teúousin*]. If one of these, in a state of powerful possession, wanders alone in the forest [*epì pléon katáskhetos genómenos planâtai katà tàs húlās mónos*], the priest captures him, binds him with a sacred chain, and feeds him generously throughout the year. Then he leads him to the sacrifice celebrated in honor of the goddess [*eis tē:n thusían tē:s theoû*], where, having anointed him with perfumes, he sacrifices him along with the other victims. The sacrifice takes place as follows: bearing the sacred lance which custom reserves only for human sacrifices, a person comes out of the crowd, advances toward the victim and strikes him in the side through to the heart, not without having learned how beforehand. When the victim falls, they make predictions by the manner in which he falls, which they announce publicly. Then the body is transported to a place where all come to step on it with their feet, which serves as a rite of purification.”

There is much about this passage which remains a puzzle for scholars of Caucasian ethnohistory, nor is it clear how literally the description is to be interpreted. Of interest to us here are four elements which can be compared to the choppa complex: (1) possession attributed to a celestial deity — here, the goddess of the moon; (2) the possessed going into a trance and prophesying; (3) the possessed wandering in the forest (i.e. outside of the domesticated space of the village); (4) the victim finally being put to death as a sacrifice to the same deity responsible for the possession. Although lightning does not play a role, and the victim is killed by a fellow human and not by an act of God, the parallels are sufficiently close to merit consideration. In particular, the possessed prophet is equated with a sacrificial victim in the most concrete manner imaginable. The sacrifice (or appropriation) takes place stepwise, however. At first the goddess takes partial possession of the victim, making him her prophet. Then she draws him into the forest, away from human society, and therefore even further into her possession. Finally, the priest who acts in her service captures the possessed person, fattens him up and then brings him to be sacrificed, completing the process. It is as though the two possible outcomes of a lightning strike — death of the victim, or election as prophet of the lightning god — are here represented as two stages in a process affecting the same victim.

III. Slavic Kupala and Georgian K'op'ala.

III. 1. EAST SLAVIC KUPALA AND HIS ANTECEDENTS.

The East Slavic summer festival of Ivan Kupala takes place on the eve of the feastday of St. John the Baptist (23-24 June, O. S.). Old Church Slavic *kōpati* and its descendents in the modern Slavic languages (such as Russian *kupat'*) mean “baptize”, also “bathe, dunk in water”. The use of this root to designate John the Baptist in Slavic seems straightforward, but the Kupala ceremony has relatively little to do with the Biblical desert prophet. In rural Russia, Ukraine and Belorussia, the festival is marked by the lighting of bonfires (called *kupalo* in some areas [Ivanov/Toporov 1974: 224]), which young people jump across, and the making of simple straw dolls, which are either burnt in the bonfire or thrown in the river [Rybakov 1987: 127-129, 153-155; 1994: 326-327]. The dolls as well are called *kupa[j]lo* (“solomennoe chuchelo, szhigaemoe v' Ivanovskuju noch” [Preobrazhenskij 1959 I: 414; cp Zelenin 1991: 396-399]); the purpose of tossing them in the river is either to ward off drought, or to predict whence a girl's future husband will come (from the direction toward which the doll floats [Propp 1963: 83]). In a detailed and richly-documented study

of the symbolism associated with the Ivan Kupala festival, Ivanov and Toporov [1974: 217-242; 1991e] demonstrate that the figure of Ivan Kupala, like other mythological personages across Central-Eastern Europe and Western Asia named after John the Baptist or the prophet Elijah, is the superficially Christianized avatar of the storm and lightning god known to many Indo-European-speaking peoples. Elijah's alleged ability to cause drought and rain [1 Kings 17:1-18:46], call down lightning from heaven to consume his sacrifice [1 Kings 18: 38] and destroy his adversaries [2 Kings 1: 9-14], and finally his assumption to heaven in a chariot of fire [2 Kings 2: 11-12] made him perfectly suitable for superposition onto the role of a lightning and storm god. On the basis of tradition and a handful of indications in the Bible [Mark 8: 28, 9: 12-13; John 1: 25; Luke 1: 17; Matthew 11: 13-14, 17: 10-12], John was widely regarded in popular Christianity as the prophet Elijah returned to earth [Averincev 1991].

Associated with the numerous past and contemporary manifestations of the IE storm god are such motifs as the symbolic conjunction or opposition of fire and water; patronage of fertility, especially grain production; and a mythic cycle featuring the Storm God and a serpent or monster, which the god defeats in order to release livestock or water for the benefit of human society. (This latter tale is considered by Ivanov and Toporov [1991d], and also by Lincoln [1981], as one of the foundational myths of early Indo-European social ideology). The pre-Christian antecedent of Ivan Kupala among the Slavs was most likely the storm deity known as Perun" in the Old Russian chronicles. By name, function and symbolism Slavic Perun" has been linked by scholars to an ancient cluster of significations and motifs attached to the PIE root **per-(k^w)-u-* "strike". Reflexes of this root appear in various IE languages with meanings including "storm and lightning god" (Balto-Slavic), "oak tree" (Latin *quercus*; possibly Celtic *(h)ercynia*; note also the location of pagan Slavic sanctuaries to Perun" in oak groves); "lightning" (Baltic *perkunas*; one possible etymology of Greek *keraunós*); "mountain, rock" (Hittite, Indic) [Gamkrelidze/Ivanov 1984: 792-794; Ivanov/Toporov 1991f, 1991g; Jakobson 1985b; Nagy 1990: 181-201]. In traditional Baltic and Slavic religion, as reconstructed by Ivanov & Toporov [1991a, 1991h], Jakobson [1985a, 1985b] and Puhvel [1989: 222-238], Perkunas-Perun" had many of the attributes of a chief god, either in his own right or as principal representative of an invisible and unreachable *deus otiosus*. As recently as 1734, the semi-pagan Balts celebrated the cult of their lightning god "Swats Parkauns" ("Saint Perkunas") on the feast-day of John the Baptist [Biezais 1975: 341]. Elliptical Greek references to the belief, already archaic and discredited in classical times, that humans originated "from oak or from stone" (*apò druós ... apò pétre:s* [Odyssey T 162]), attest to the association of **per-(k^w)-u-* with fertility, as do the old Lithuanian folk beliefs that lightning could beget children where it struck [Nagy 1990: 196-201; cp Puhvel 1989: 226-227]. The Latvian deity Perkons was believed to assure abundant crops of grains, especially rye, barley and hops [Biezais 1975: 342-343]. In other IE traditions as well, storm gods were invoked for rain and/or good harvests (e.g. Scandinavian Thor as patron of cereals), and to insure fertility (Indra bringer of "prosperity, harvest, longevity, masculine force, wealth, livestock" [Toporov 1991]).

Returning to the Caucasus, we find parallels to components of the Indo-European storm god complex in Ossetic religion, where one would expect to find them, and in neighboring traditions. The Ossetic Wacilla, as Dumézil has demonstrated, continues numerous features shared by IE war-

and-storm deities such as Indra and Thor.²⁰ In addition to purely meteorological functions, Wacilla is celebrated in Ossetic folklore as a slayer of demons and protector of people and livestock against evil spirits. In particular, the Ossetes would invoke him each New Year's Eve for protection against the *kurysdzæutæ*, dangerous spirits who rule over the *kurys*, “une prairie mythique où poussent les semences de toutes les productions de la terre, et aussi le bonheur et le malheur” [Dumézil 1978: 67-74]. This luxurious, otherworldly prairie — cognate, according to Ivanov and Toporov, with the Greek Elysian Fields and Scandinavian Valhalla — appears to be descended from a topos in the archaic Indo-European storm-god cycle [1991d]. The serpent, adversary of the storm god, is represented as possessing vast herds of livestock, which it keeps on a wide meadow in the underworld. The storm god does battle with the monster and finally slays it, freeing the animals. The opposition between the storm god (Wacilla) and the proprietors of the “Elysian Fields” is retained in the Ossetic materials, albeit in attenuated form. Another function of Wacilla which is probably inherited from his IE forebear is that of assuring an abundant grain harvest. One of the chief festivals in honor of Wacilla is called *xory bon* “cereal day”; Ossetic women, for whom the name of this deity is taboo, refer to him by the paraphrase *xory xicau* “maître du blé” [Benveniste 1959: 140]. The Northwest-Caucasian-speaking Abazas likewise invoke their lightning god for a rich harvest of cereal crops [Pershits 1989: 224].

Deities with comparable attributes are featured in the traditional religious systems of other Caucasian communities, even though the choppa ritual is not known to have been practiced there. One such case is Mingrelian *žini antar*, “Upper (celestial) Antar”, whose name was compared by Javaxishvili [1960: 122-123] to that of Abkhaz Aytar (the shift /n/ > /l/ > /j/ is attested elsewhere in Mingrelian, cp. *majazoni* < *malazoni* < Geo. *monazoni* < “monk”). Antar has been equated by Abak'elia [1991: 6-26] with the personages invoked in various rituals under the names *žiniši orta*, “Orta [= “portion”?] from above”, simply *žiniši* “the one above”, or *žgege*, the Mingrelian St. George. Prayers and offerings (especially of roosters or goats) are made to Antar/Orta/George in

²⁰ Certain features of Wacilla, as well as of the Nart hero Batradz (the original Man of Steel, a semi-divine warrior who descends upon his adversaries like a thunderbolt), have been traced back by Dumézil to the unnamed Scythian deity glossed by Herodotus as “Ares” [Dumézil 1978: 19-90]. Although not considered one of the chief gods of Scythians, the sanctuaries and festival dedicated to “Ares” differ significantly from those in honor of the other deities. “No images, altars or temples” are used in the worship of these latter, according to Herodotus, and sacrificial animals (horses or cattle) are slain and cooked following a set pattern. As for “Ares”, a temple dedicated to him stands “in every district”; each temple consists in a vast pile of wood (a scarce commodity in the steppes), “having a square platform on the top”. “An antique iron sword is planted on the top of every such mound: it serves as the image of Ares. Annual sacrifices of cattle and of horses are made to it, and in greater numbers than to all of the other gods”. Furthermore, one of every hundred prisoners of war is immolated at the temple of Ares, and their blood poured over the sword. These human sacrifices conclude with a macabre but intriguing gesture: “the right hands and arms of the slaughtered prisoners are cut off, and tossed up into the air. Then the other victims are slain, and those who have offered the sacrifice depart, leaving the arms where they fell, and the bodies also, separate” [Herodotus *History* IV: 59-62]. Dumézil was struck by the resemblance between the piles of brushwood in the above account, and the enormous quantity of wood burnt by the Narts to temper the steel body of Batradz and render him nearly invulnerable [1978: 30-32]. Other details, in my view, may have found distant parallels in the cult of Ossetic Wacilla. The platform set atop the mound of wood in Ares' “temple” may be continued by the platform used in the choppa ceremonies; the pouring of blood over the sword might also be historically linked to the widespread Caucasian practice of stretching of the skin of the sacrificed goat on a wooden pole planted next to the platform. There are of course no direct modern correlates of the human sacrifices ascribed to the Scythians by Herodotus, but an echo may be discerned in the traditional West Caucasian interpretation of death from lightning-strike as tantamount to sacrifice (albeit at the god's initiative). The throwing of the slain warrior's arms in the air — as well as the leaving of their corpses on the spot of sacrifice — would accordingly signal a belief that these victims, having been appropriated (upward) by the deity, are off-limits to human society.

times of lightning strike, excessive rain or drought; to insure a good harvest; and for healing from certain illnesses, especially psychological ones. St. George of Ilor, one of West Georgia's holiest shrines, is also called upon to witness oaths and to curse oath-breakers. Lightning was believed to be the preferred weapon of St. George for pursuing unclean spirits, punishing those who offended him, and for selecting individuals as "servants" (These servants always wore white or colored clothing, even when in mourning. Abak'elia notes that "servants of the one above" [žiniši maxvameri] are called upon to pray for the protection of people and property from lightning). The place where lightning struck is called nažvarleni in Mingrelian (lit. "spot where a cross [žvari] had been"), since lightning was believed to fall either in the form of a cross or that of a split-tipped arrow [bordzal], another weapon associated with St. George. Objects struck by lightning were not to be used or even touched. for fear of provoking the deity's anger [Abak'elia *loc. cit.*].

The Weinax (Chechen and Ingush) supreme deity S(t)ela or Seli is represented as a particularly touchy and frequently hostile weather-god. He is armed with the rainbow as a bow, and lightning bolts as arrows, and is imagined as the source of snow, hail and other extreme weather phenomena. In the springtime month named for him (Seli-but "month/moon of Seli") he is invoked in prayers for rain and a good harvest. At the same time, Weinax legends describe how Seli punished various heroes and gods — including his son Elta, the divine patron of cereals and wild animals — for providing people with the means for existence: livestock, water, grain and fire [Tankiev 1991; Mal'sagov 1991; B. Dalgat 1893: 107-117; U. Dalgat 1972: 54-55, 258-260]. The 19th-century ethnographer B. Dalgat [op. cit.] compared Seli to Ossetic Wacilla. Furthermore, "those killed by lightning were considered blessed. According to the Ingush, if people mourn for such a victim, the body will turn black in color. The place where a person or animal was killed by lightning is considered holy, and each year a sacrifice to Seli is performed there".²¹

Although the Karachays and Balkars are speakers of a Turkic language, their lightning god Choppa (or Elliri Choppa) is marked by features likely to stem from an IE source. He is described as a fertility deity, second in importance to the chief god Teyri; the IE warrior and storm gods (Dumézil's "second function") are likewise subordinate to the sovereign *deiwo-s-pater "bright-sky-father", and many are invoked for fertility. The choppa ritual performed on the occasion of the first thunder of the year ("opening of the celestial vaults") features jumping over bonfires, the burning of Choppa dolls, and other practices reminiscent of the East Slavic Ivan Kupala festival [Karaketov 1995]. The same is true of the rain-making rituals associated with Kabardian cop'ay. The Khantseguashe "shovel-lady" fetish brought by women to the riverbank, where they splash each other with water while the men pray for rain, is almost certainly connected — directly or indirectly — with the Slavic kupa(j)lo doll. Similar rain-making rituals, involving a doll or fetish dunked in water, are known in Georgia and elsewhere in the Caucasus [Chikovani 1972: 252-8; Shamanov 1994].²²

²¹ In the same passage, Dalgat [1893] relates the legend of a certain Auš, whose mausoleum (ēl'gyc) was regarded as a holy site, even though it was believed that Seli had slain him with a thunderbolt for an unwitting violation of the mountaineers' code of honor.

²² Sometimes the dolls are used for the opposite function: among the Khinalughs, a Daghestanian people of Azerbaijan, "during heavy rainfall young people made dolls of boards (guzhul), which they dressed in women's clothing and carried throughout the village while singing ... that 'tomorrow the sun will shine'" [Volkova 1994; on

In view of the long history of contacts between the peoples of the Caucasus and those of the steppes to the north, contacts which go back at least to the Bronze Age and probably further into the past [Gadzhiev 1991; Gej 1996], and the evidence of IE loanwords borrowed by Caucasian languages at various periods [Klimov 1991; Nichols 1997; Tuite/Schulze 1998], historical links between the IE and Caucasian storm-god complexes should be no cause for surprise. At the same time, certain steppe-IE motifs appear to be absent, or nearly so, in the Caucasian ethnographic record, or present but in significantly transformed guise. The motif of enmity between the storm god and a serpent or monster guarding a valued resource (typically, livestock) does appear here and there in Caucasian folklore, but in general, the serpent plays a less uniformly negative role than in the IE cultural area. It is a particularly striking fact that the very name of the Circassian lightning god, Shyble, means literally “horse-serpent” [Charachidzé 1981a], and as was mentioned above, the Kabardians imagine him in the form of a fiery serpent. The pouring of milk on the spot where lightning struck, a practice observed in Kabardia and Ossetia, may reflect the same association between serpents and milk that Chartolani [1961: 198] noted among the Svans, who believed that snakes liked “white” foods such as dairy products, and who interpret the sighting of a snake by the hearth as a sign of abundance.

Before going further, let us review the principal points covered so far: Analysis of the choppa rituals of the western Caucasus reveals a number of common features, attributed to the deity of lightning and storms. In particular, this god takes the initiative in choosing his own sacrificial victims, and striking them with his thunderbolt. Those who survive are possessed by the deity, and go into his service as prophets; those who die are buried on the spot, away from the village. In general, anyone or anything struck by lightning is regarded as “sacred” in the old sense of the word: appropriated by a deity, and at the same time taboo, off limits to humans. The choppa song and dance performed around the body of a lightning-strike victim is also used to provoke rain during a drought, and as a cure for certain types of mental illness. A description of Caucasian Albanian religious practices by the geographer Strabo indicates that the association between sacrifice, possession and madness goes back at least two millennia in the Caucasus region.

III.2. K’OP’ALA, “DIEU FULGURANT”?

In the first book of his monumental *History of the Georgian people*, the historian Ivane Javakhishvili provided brief sketches of numerous figures from traditional Georgian religion and folklore. He devoted two pages to the Pkhovian xvtisšvili (“child of God”) K’op’ala. Most of the numerous legends and ballads featuring K’op’ala celebrate his prowess as an ogre-slayer, who rid the Georgian highlands of the fearsome man-eating giants who had until then oppressed the human population. Javakhishvili noted in passing that the name of K’op’ala resembles those of the Near-Eastern goddess Cybele and the Russian Kupala, but as he saw little other basis for postulating a historical link among them, he did not pursue the matter in any depth [1960 I: 97-98]. Charachidzé [1968: 340-1] cited Javakhishvili’s half-hearted proposal as though it had been intended seriously, then flatly rejected it as completely unfounded. With regard to Kupala, he could find little in the

a similar ritual among the Aghuls and Lezgins, see Ixilov 1967: 225]. The practice of jumping across bonfires at the beginning of summer is likewise widespread in the Caucasus, especially among the Lezgin peoples of Daghestan [Kosven et al. 1960: 516; Ixilov 1967: 223].

descriptions known to him (primarily supplied by Propp [1963]), to support a link to K'op'ala. “Quant à la ressemblance des noms,” he continues, “elle repose, du côté russe, sur un malentendu ... *Kupala* signifie ... tout simplement «baptiste», renvoyant au chrétien saint Jean-Baptiste et nullement à quelque divinité de l'ancien paganisme slave” [1968: 341]. I will attempt in the following pages to demonstrate that Javakhishvili's tentative juxtaposition of K'op'ala and Kupala was not in fact as ill-advised as Charachidzé claimed, and that further examination of the dossiers of the two deities makes it look quite reasonable.²³

One of these dossiers, that of K'op'ala, has in fact been assembled and analyzed with exemplary thoroughness by Charachidzé himself [1968: 337-433; 1981b]. Although K'op'ala is rarely linked to lightning in any explicit way, it is significant that Charachidzé characterizes him as a “dieu fulgurant” [1981b: 455], an epithet motivated by the numerous features shared by K'op'ala and such Indo-European war-and-storm gods as Indra and the Ossetic Nart hero Batradz. K'op'ala is physically the strongest of the *xvtisšvili*, the deities created by the supreme god Ghmerti, and in one ballad he is portrayed besting them in a weight-lifting contest. Like his IE counterparts, K'op'ala, often in the company of his comrade and near-double Iaqsar, wages a campaign of extermination against the ogres and demons which once inhabited the Georgian highlands in great numbers, slaying them with his massive club. According to one legend, K'op'ala killed an ogre which had been damming the Aragvi River with gigantic boulders in an attempt to deprive the Pkhovians of water [Ochiauri 1991: 44; Vazha-Pshavela 1889]; this motif has numerous parallels in the repertoire of the IE storm god.²⁴ According to Charachidzé [1968: 428-431], among the core functions of K'op'ala in the religious system of the Pkhovian mountaineers are “circulation and mediation”. K'op'ala (and Iaqsar) circulate between the celestial, terrestrial and underwater realms, and undergo transformation from human to animal and, finally, to divine form. One especially significant component of K'op'ala's circulating and mediating activity is the liberation of “trapped” souls [*sulis gamoqsna*]. Should a person die of drowning or hanging, or be killed by an avalanche, the oracle of K'arat'is-Jvari, the Khevsur shrine dedicated to K'op'ala, is summoned to the scene. (This shrine is also known under the name “Soul-saver” [*sultamqsneli*]). The Pkhovians believed that a soul trapped under a surface of water or snow, or stuck within a cadaver with the throat constricted by a noose, could not escape and risked capture by demons. Bearing the banner of the shrine, the oracle would call upon the patron deity of K'arat'is-Jvari to liberate the victim's soul and slay the demons that threatened it. A goat was slaughtered with a back-handed stroke of the knife, as is considered appropriate by the Pkhovians for an appeasement sacrifice to demons, and its meat left uneaten on the spot, as an offering in exchange for the soul [Mak'alatia 1935: 216]. Consistent with his function as a liberator of souls, K'op'ala was also invoked to treat certain physical and mental illnesses attributed to possession by demons, especially cases of insanity

²³ Analysis of the ethnographic data concerning the Ivan Kupala complex led Ivanov and Toporov [1965: 146-147; 1991e] to propose that the name Kup-al-a derives from an IE root **kwep/kup* which they gloss “kipet', vskipat', strastno zhelat'” (seethe, boil, passionately desire), rather than Old Church Slavic *kōpati*, a possible borrowing from Latin *compater* or some other source [Preobrazhenskij 1959 I: 412-4; Vasmer 1953 I: 695]. Recently, however, Rix et al. [1998: 334] revised the reconstructed form of the IE root claimed to be antecedent to Kupala (**kweH₁p-* “sieden”), and in so doing separated it from both **kwep-* “hauchen” and **kewp-* “(innerlich) beben”; Pokorny had grouped reflexes of these three roots under the single lemma **kwe:p-/*kewəp-/*kwəp-/*ku(:)p-* “rauchen, wallen, kochen; auch seelisch in Aufruhr, in heftiger Bewegung sein” [1959 I: 596-7].

²⁴ Ivanov and Toporov consider the theme of a storm god liberating a water source blocked by monsters to be a variant of the storm-god-defeats-serpent myth [1974: 138-141].

[Charachidzé 1968: 405-422; Mindadze 2000: 202-206].

If indeed certain elements of K'op'ala's character match those of Indra, Batradz and other Indo-European “second-function” deities, others do not. The chief enemies of K'op'ala and Iaqsar are ogres (many-headed man-eating giants) rather than a wealth-guarding serpent. At the same time, a mythical serpent [*gvelisperi*] does appear in the K'op'ala cycle, but in a supporting, rather than adversarial, role. This serpent is said to patrol the borders of the fields of hops used to make ritual beer for use at K'op'ala's sanctuary of K'arat'is-Jvari [Charachidzé 1968: 421-422].²⁵ In view of what was mentioned above concerning the Circassian lightning-god Shyble, one wonders if the serpent *gvelisperi* was once considered a transformation of K'op'ala himself. The absence of lightning in K'op'ala's résumé also represents a significant contrast with its ubiquity in the portrayals of IE deities such as Indra. One curious fact might help explain this seeming anomaly. According to a Khevsur informant interviewed by Georgian ethnographers in the earlier part of the past century, lightning was believed to have been created by God to massacre demons. Hence any human killed by lightning was thought to have been killed in error by a thunderbolt aimed at a demon which went astray. As compensation, God would take the unintended victim to his realm; therefore “whoever dies from a lightning strike is happy in the Land of Souls” [Baliauri & Mak'alatia 1940: 53].²⁶

Let us take the step — which the reader has doubtless anticipated for some time now — of juxtaposing the east-central Caucasian K'op'ala and the lightning gods of the western Caucasus. In addition to some shared traits, such as the power to cure mental illness, others appear to be in a relation of inversion. As was demonstrated earlier, the west-Caucasian storm gods seize their victims by lightning strike, and appropriate them UPWARD into their celestial realm. A goat is sacrificed to appease the anger of a beneficial, but dangerous, sky god. In the case of K'op'ala, by contrast, his function is liberate souls which have been captured DOWNWARD by demons. A black goat is the sacrifice of choice, but in Pkhovi it is intended to appease the demons, not the deity. Wacilla, Shyble and the other lightning gods strike without warning, and seize their “offerings” without awaiting the permission of the community. K'op'ala, represented by his oracle, comes when called upon by people to rescue trapped souls. Lightning, the instrument by which the IE and west-Caucasian storm gods appropriate their victims, was imagined by some Pkhovians as a weapon specifically directed against demons, not people. As in the west, those killed by lightning-strike are believed to end up in a special place in the afterlife, but for very different reasons: the Ossetes regard them as victims called by Wacilla to his side, whereas the Pkhovians regard their good fortune in *suleti*, the Land of Souls, as compensation for their accidental death. The contrast between the sets of representations is striking. In the Pkhovian imagination, K'op'ala

²⁵ Such fields are considered the property of the shrine and its patron deity in Pkhovi, and the grain that is harvested from them is stored in special granaries, which only a delegated shrine official can enter.

²⁶ This does not appear any longer to be the most widely-shared view of the matter, if it ever was. According to the Pshav and Khevsur natives interviewed by me, lightning death is treated like drowning or suicide. The chief priest goes to the site of the tragedy and sacrifices a goat in order to appease the “evil angel” (*avi_angelozhi*) believe to pursue the souls of those who die an unnatural death. Either K'op'ala or Iaqsar may be invoked on this occasion. The meat of the sacrificed goat was tossed backwards over the priest's shoulder and left on the spot for the demons. The sacrificers did not eat any of it. The victim's body, if recovered, was then returned to the village for burial in the cemetery [interviews with Thek'le Badrishvili-Gosharashvili, July 1997; Pilip'e Baghauri, 25 June 2000; Tinatin Ochiauri, 30 June 2000; cp. Ochiauri 1991].

is not so much a lightning god as a representation of combative force harnessed for the service of the community. In this respect he resembles St. George rather more than Elijah.

III.3. K'OP'ALA, IAQSAR, P'IRKUSH AND ST. GEORGE.

Of the various patron deities commemorated in invocations, ballads and hymns, several are described as naxorcivlarni, “former mortals” who were granted divine status by God in exchange for service in the battle against ogres. Chief among these are K'op'ala, Iaqsar, and the mythical goldsmith and weapons-maker P'irkush [Ochiauri 1991: 41-45; 95; 155]. The features and activities attributed to Iaqsar are so similar to those of K'op'ala that Charachidzé [1981b: 455] characterized Iaqsar as K'op'ala's “hypostase”.²⁷ Many Pkhovian texts designate him as K'op'ala's sworn brother (modzme) or even as his genuine brother [Ochiauri 1991: 128]. Both are celebrated for their superhuman strength, granted to them by God to enable them to free the land of ogres. Both undergo underwater shape-changes. In one cycle of ballads, K'op'ala is depicted diving into a river and resurfacing in the form of a deer. In another, Iaqsar pursues a one-eyed ogre who plunges into a lake (usually said to be Abudelauris T'ba, outside of the Khevsur village Roshk'a); Iaqsar dives in after the ogre and kills him, but the ogre's impure blood blocks the surface of the lake, trapping Iaqsar underwater. He is freed only after people clear the water with the blood of a four-horned, four-eared ram. When Iaqsar reappears at the surface, he has been transformed into a shining, winged deity. The artisan P'irkush produced weapons used to slay the ogres. He was himself captured by the ogres, but later set free by Iaqsar. The association of P'irkush and the heroes Iaqsar and K'op'ala was compared by Ivanov and Toporov [1974: 148-163] to the motif of a Hephaestus-type blacksmith who provides arms with thunderbolt-like characteristics to a war-and-storm god, attested in the Greek, Scandinavian and Indic traditions, but also outside of the Indo-European world. The theme of a “Dieu de l'ouragan [qui] reçoit ses armes — l'éclair et la foudre — de la part d'un Forgeron divin” occurs in ancient Egyptian and Near-Eastern mythologies [Eliade 1977: 84-85]. Abkhazian tradition as well associates the lightning-god Afə and the divine blacksmith Shashwə (and metalworking in general, as in the proverb cited by Ardzinba [1988: 277]: “the forge is a fragment of Afə”).

Although there is evidence supporting Ivanov and Toporov's postulated historical link of K'op'ala, Iaqsar and P'irkush to the IE war-and-storm-god complex, in the context of Pkhovian tradition these and other divinized heroes are associated most closely with Giorgi, the Pkhovian St. George. The various Transcaucasian St. Georges have as their principal function the patronage and protection of men fulfilling their roles as exploiters, for the profit of their communities, of the undomesticated space outside of the village and its adjacent fields. St. George is the protector of shepherds, hunters, travellers, and men raiding cattle from their neighbors on the other side of the mountains [Charachidzé 1968: 620; Tuite 1998]. The image of K'op'ala, massacrer of ogres and idealization of masculine prowess, thus considerably overlaps that of St. George. One informant interviewed by the folklorist M. Chikovani went so far as to equate K'op'ala and Giorgi: k'op'ala

²⁷ The phonological shape of the name “Iaqsar” does not look Georgian. The most promising source, as Abaev has demonstrated [1958-1989 IV: 224-225] is pre-Osetic (æ)xsar “martial valor, force, power” (< Ir. *xšaθra < In-Ir. *kšatra-) [cp. Dumézil 1995: 488]. The proposed derivation from the root which was, among other things, the Indo-Iranian designation of Dumézil's “2nd function” fits extremely well with the reconstruction proposed here for Iaqsar's double K'op'ala.

igive c'minda giorgia “K'op'ala is the same as St. George” [Chikovani 1972: 338], an identification earlier noted by Javakhishvili [1960 I: 97-98]. Charachidzé noted a Pkhovian invocation addressed to “the force of Saint George of K'op'ala” (dzalo c'minda giorgi k'op'alesao), which was called upon to defend those who “go in the spaces far from home, who go far, who go to hunt” [Charachidzé 1968: 406, 445]. At the powerful Khevsur shrine of St. George at Gudani, the xvtisšvilni K'op'ala and Saneba — likewise a “patron des prédateurs (pillards et chasseurs)” — are invoked as temporary replacements (moadgile) of Giorgi, should the latter be for some reason unreachable [Charachidzé 1968: 470].

The identification of K'op'ala and St. George in Pkhovi can be compared to the representations of the various Elijahs and St. Georges in the western Caucasian belief systems. In Rach'a and Ossetia, Elijah and St. George form a pair, with related but contrastive functions. As mentioned earlier, the Georgians of highland Rach'a prayed to Ilia for rain in times of drought, and to Giorgi to protect their crops from hail. If the powerful but often destructive Ilia — represented in many parts of Georgia as a blind deity scattering rain and hail upon good and bad alike — is the image of uncontrolled natural force, Giorgi represented controlled, specifically masculine force, deployed for the profit and defense of human society. Vielle [1997: 190-191] characterizes Ossetic Wacilla and Wastyrji in comparable terms: the former as “la foudre impitoyable”, whereas the latter represents “la virilité exacerbée”. At the linguistic level, these two are the only significant Ossetic deities whose names are prefixed by wac-/was- “saint” (Wastyrdji < *was-gergi), and the names of both are taboo to women.²⁸ Wacilla, doubled by the spirit Tyxost (whom Dumézil considers the more direct continuation of the ancient IE lightning-god in Ossetic religion [1978: 67-74]), is by no means blind, and his functions, like those of other IE second-function divinities, include fertility, rain-making and protection against enemies. This last feature, as Dumézil notes, overlaps the war-and-defense-related role of Wastyrji. Partial overlap of the representations of Elijah and St. George is in fact fairly widespread in East European folk Christianity. The South Slavic Zeleni Juraj “Green George”, for example, whose festival is celebrated on 23-24 April, was invoked for springtime fertility and protection of livestock from predators (especially wolves) [Ivanov/Toporov 1974: 180-216; Koleva 1974]. At a chronologically deeper level, there is evidence from several traditions for the exchange of features between what some specialists in Indo-European comparative religion have reconstructed as a Varuna-type sovereign deity (associated with magic, prophecy, and the punishment of oathbreakers with disease; the deity underlying Elijah), and an Indra-type monster-slaying war god, overlain by St. George. The Greek supreme deity Zeus is a notable example, having incorporated many of the attributes reconstructed for the second-function war god, including the use of thunderbolts [Sergent 1997: 302-305; Puhvel 1987: 130-131]. The Baltic and Slavic “divine striker” *Per(k)un- might represent the opposite phenomenon, that is, a storm-and-war god taking over the attributes of a first-function Varuna-type celestial sovereign [Jakobson 1985b]. In the case of Pkhovian K'op'ala, however, overlap with the representation of Giorgi has gone to the point of assimilation, at the cost of those features of the west-Caucasian and IE storm gods related to sacrifice, possession, and the unpredictable use of force.

²⁸ Women referred to Wacilla as xory xicau “lord of grains” and Wastyrji as lægty dzwar “patron-saint of men” [Dumézil 1978: 238; Benveniste 1959:133, 140].

The transformation of a deity comparable to Ossetic Wacilla/Alardy and Slavic Perun"/Kupala into Pkhovian K'op'ala is highly significant. On the one hand, we have a dangerous, unpredictable storm god who uses his thunderbolts to select his own sacrificial victims — without waiting for the human community to choose one for him —, and whose anger needs to be appeased by additional sacrifice. Those victims offered to him, or slain by his thunderbolt, are dangerously sacred, and cannot be brought back to the village. On the other hand is a powerful deity who slays demons and ogres for the benefit of humankind. Although it is not specified who throws it, the lightning bolt as well is intended to exterminate demons, and therefore in general a useful thing. K'op'ala has the special mission to free souls captured by demons, and bring them back to their community, whence they can follow the normal trajectory to the Land of Souls. Compared to his Abkhaz, Ossetic, and Kabardian counterparts, therefore, K'op'ala appears as a thoroughly domesticated deity, a reliable defender of the human community. Rather than capture souls, he is always on call to free them from demons. Indeed, it is evident that the negative aspects of the west-Caucasian storm gods have been projected onto the Pkhovian demons, and only the positive features have been inherited by K'op'ala. The derivation of K'op'ala from Kupala might seem to some to be a highly speculative hypothesis, despite the phonetic similarity between the names, and the various semantic resemblances shared by K'op'ala and the divine personages discussed elsewhere in this paper. What renders it more probable is its consistence with what appears to have been a thorough-going restructuring — one could even call it a *reform* — of the inherited religious system in Pkhovi some centuries ago. This restructuring gave rise to new conceptions of the priesthood, of the relation between human society and the supernatural realms, and of sacrifice and possession.

IV. The Pkhovian reform.

The provinces of Pshavi and Khevsureti would, on the face of it, seem unlikely candidates to be the last refuge of Caucasian paganism, a religious system still relatively intact up until World War II and the mass resettlement of the Khevsurs in the 1950's. Pkhovi, as these two provinces were called in the medieval Georgian chronicles (and as I will refer to them here), is situated only 100 km north of the Georgian capital Tbilisi, and the local population speaks a variety of Georgian not very different from the standard language of six or seven centuries ago. There is certainly nothing remotely comparable to the extreme linguistic diversity of Daghestan, or even that of western Georgia, where the Kartvelian languages Mingrelian and Svan, and the unrelated Northwest Caucasian language Abkhaz, are spoken by sizeable speech communities. The paradox does not stop there. Svaneti was no less inaccessible from the lowland west Georgian (Imeretian) capital of Kutaisi than Pkhovi is from Tbilisi, yet the Svan elite participated actively in the early medieval political formations of Lazica (4th-5th cc. AD) and Abkhazia (8th-10th cc.), and subsequently in the Georgian kingdom united by Bagrat III and Davit IV (11th-13th cc.). The more remote district of Upper Svaneti alone, along the upper valley of the Ingur River, has over one hundred Georgian Orthodox churches, almost all of them constructed in the period from the 9th to the 13th centuries, the golden age of Georgian feudalism [Taq'aishvili 1991].²⁹ I have argued elsewhere that the traditional religious practices of the Svans, as attested in the late 19th and 20th centuries, show the

²⁹ Frequent contacts between lowland centers and even the most remote valleys of Upper Svaneti go back at least to the Bronze Age, when Svaneti was an important source of high-grade metals (especially arsenic-rich copper and gold), giving rise to local, Svanetian schools of metalworking and other arts.

imprint of centuries of feudalism, which persisted as a political and economic order until its abolition by the Tsarist government in the mid-19th century [Tuite 1999]. Pkhovi, by contrast, is rarely mentioned by medieval chroniclers, and when it is, it is usually characterized as a nest of unruly pagans, which can only be pacified by the sword. Christian churches are conspicuously absent, as is any evidence of the implantation of lowland-style feudalism. The social and political system was essentially classless and egalitarian — with one important exception — up to the present day. Yet a closer examination of the chants, ballads, and ethnographic descriptions of Pkhovian culture reveals a surprising fact: Christianity and feudalism have in fact left a profound imprint on the traditional religious system, but only at the *cosmological* level.

The nature of the restructuring undergone by the inherited religious system in Pkhovi can be best understood through a comparison with the traditional religion of the Svans. As Charachidzé [1968: 109] noted, non-Christian practices and beliefs observed in both Svaneti and Pkhovi are likely to be very ancient, going back to the time of the separation of the Svan language from the ancestral Proto-Kartvelian language in the Bronze Age. The investigations of Bardavelidze [1957], Charachidzé [1968], Virsaladze [1976] and this writer [Tuite 1999, 2000], among others, have uncovered a number of common features which would appear to have been characteristic of the Georgian belief system of four or five millennia ago:

(1) The contrast, or opposition, of male-linked/divine “purity” and female-linked/corporeal “impurity”, the latter derived from an ancient representation of women as inherently powerful, but threatening to male/divine “purity”. People, places and objects can be rendered more “pure” by the blood of sacrificed animals, which contrasted with the dangerous, “polluting” blood of women shed during menstruation and childbirth. Associated with this notion of opposed principles of “purity” and “impurity” is the seeming paradox that the survival of the community requires contact and cooperation between them.

(2) A gradient hierarchy of beings according to their degree of participation in the divine principle, a factor which is susceptible to increase or decrease.

(3) Practices which foster network-building and relations of interdependence between neighboring social groups, such as exogamically-oriented marital preferences, fictive kinship (sworn siblinghood, adoption, fosterage) crossing class and ethnic lines, and perhaps something akin to the “believer-unbeliever” shrines at the Pkhovi-Weinax frontier, at which both Georgians and Chechens worshipped [Goniashvili 1971; T. Ochiauri 1967: 68-70; Volkova 1989: 200-203].

(4) Paired female and male divine beings, of which the female circulates between the hearth (the interior of domestic space, the “interior of the interior”) and the remote, uninhabited, unreachable outside (“exterior of the exterior”). Her male counterpart, usually named after St. George (Geo. *Givargi*, Svan *žgeræg*), circulates between the public spaces of the community (the “exterior of the interior”) and those outside spaces exploited for the profit of the community (the “interior of the exterior”). For this reason, the various St. Georges are invoked as patrons of hunters, woodsmen, travellers, warriors, even livestock-thieves. The relationship between these two deities is the model for an institution Charachidzé [1968: 101] called “anti-marriage” (Geo. *c’ac’loba*, Svan *č’æ:č’i:lær*), which contrasts with marriage on a number of parameters: it involves a temporary, premarital relationship between a woman and man from the same community, which must under no circumstances terminate in marriage or childbirth [Tuite 2000].

The ancestral religion has evolved along very different paths in Svaneti and in Pkhovi. In a recent study of the impact of medieval lowland Georgian socio-political hierarchicalization (“feudalism”) on the religious systems of the eastern and western Georgian highlands, I noted a sharp distinction between the changes undergone by Svanetian traditional religion — in reaction to the implantation of feudal institutions, Orthodox churches and a local aristocracy from at least the 9th century —, and those which occurred in Pkhovi, which “n’a jamais été intégrée au système féodal” [Charachidzé 1971: 45], despite the sporadic incursions of royal troops bent on bringing them to submission. The notions of Orthodox Christianity and feudal socio-economic organization reached Pkhovi via transmission from neighboring tribes, some of which had become nominal fiefs of the Georgian crown, although with minimal impact on their traditional systems of land tenure and self-governance. Lowland concepts also percolated into the mountains through the mediation of satellite communities in the eastern Georgian provinces of Tianeti and K’akheti, formed over the centuries by Pkhovians in search of farmland, vineyards and pastures [Topchiashvili 1981, 1984]. Until the mass displacements of the Soviet period, Pkhovians living at lower altitudes maintained regular contact with the highland communities, especially on the occasions of major festivals. The religious and cultural centers remained in Pkhovi, although the major highland shrines were linked to subordinate sanctuaries in the peripheral areas, the resident xvtisšvilni of which were typically designated as their “younger brothers”. As a regime of land ownership based on the hierarchical and personal relation between vassals and lords, feudalism (Geo. p’at’ronq’moba, lit. “lord-vassality”) provided the Pkhovians with new concepts and terminology for imagining the mutual dependency between humans and deities, and the relationship of both to the land. To summarize very briefly, the hierarchy of human and supernatural beings came to be conceived in feudal terms, with the supreme deity (ymerti) enthroned at a heavenly court (yvtis k’ari), where the xvtisšvilni (“children of God”) periodically assemble. These latter are divided into those created divine by God (cit čamosulni, “descended from heaven” to found a sanctuary), and the naxorcivlarni, “former mortals”, legendary heroes who had been elevated to divine status by him [Ochiauri 1991: 14]. Like a feudal monarch, God divided the land among the xvtisšvilni and set them in authority over the people dwelling on their territory [Ochiauri 1991: 49, 53-55, 95, 129]. The xvtisšvilni are addressed as bat’onni “lords”, the members of the community refer to themselves as q’mani “vassals”, a terminology identical to that of medieval Georgian feudalism in the lowlands. The patron xvtisšvili of each highland clan or commune is believed to reside in a shrine, a complex of simple stone building outside of the village. The shrine, its surrounding territory, and a sizeable portion of the community’s farmland, pastures and forests are said to belong to the invisible “lord”, being designated xat’is mamuli “shrine’s [hereditary] land” or xodabuni (another borrowing from the lexicon of lowland feudalism, meaning “lord’s land”). The shrine lands were worked by the “vassals” collectively, with a sizeable portion of the harvest retained by the shrine. The grain, considered sacred, was stored by a shrine official in a special granary, and used to brew beer and bake bread for communal feastdays. Should a “vassal” die without leaving heirs, or emigrate from the community, the family lands reverted to the shrine. The texts from Pshavi collected by Ochiauri [1991: 39-40, 271-272] include accounts of a human overlord from the lowlands transferring possession of an escaped serf to a divine overlord in the mountains, and of two adjacent xvtisšvilni depicted quarreling over possession of land and the peasants living on it.

The “feudalization” of Pkhovian cosmology appears to have occurred in the context of a generalized restructuring of the indigenous religious system, and a monopolization of important social and religious functions by specialist priests (qevisberi or xucesi, “elder”) and oracles (kadagi, sometimes the same person as the chief priest), recruited from specific lineages in each community. In Svaneti, for example, many feasts are celebrated within the home or among a group of neighboring households (called lask’ær), and are presided over by the elder man or woman of the host family. Prayers and the presentation of offerings in public ritual spaces (mostly Orthodox churches, which came into the possession of local lineage groups after the abolition of feudalism) are the responsibility of household heads or semi-professional “priests” (bap’ær) who were trained by apprenticeship to a more experienced priest, and who serve at the pleasure of the village council [Xaradze & Robakidze 1964: 86].³⁰ In Pkhovi, by contrast, the household is far less often used as a ceremonial site, except during the late-winter and spring season — corresponding to Orthodox Lent — when the family members (usually the womenfolk) perform a series of domestic rituals intended to appease or ward off potential sources of harm. At other times of the year almost all ceremonies are performed at one or another of the community’s public shrines, under the direction of the clan’s chief priest (tav-qevisberi). All animal sacrifices were performed by the priest or his designated assistants.³¹ The two principal types of sacrifice were the *purificatory* offering of a bull or sheep, intended to make the sacrificer(s) more acceptable to the purity-obsessed xvtisšvilni, and the *propitiatory* offering of a goat either to deities of subordinate rank and ambiguous nature (the potentially malicious dobilni, “sworn sisters” of the xvtisšvilni), or to “ogres” (devebi) and “demons” (ešmak’ebi). Note that in Pkhovi, as informants have repeatedly affirmed, goats are *never* sacrificed to the male xvtisšvilni. This represents an important contrast to the Abkhazian and Ossetian practice, mentioned earlier, of offering goats to their most powerful male-gendered gods.³²

³⁰ As one Svan proverb puts it “the folk-doctor, the priest and the blacksmith are for everyone” (akimi p’ap’i muškit čimiš li), that is, they are considered specialized practitioners in the service of the community [Nizharadze 1962: 173].

³¹ Indeed, the ethnographic materials from a century ago imply that the only meat eaten by Pkhovians came either from domestic animals ceremonially slaughtered by a shrine official, or game animals killed by a hunter (whose activities during the hunt in many respects parallel those of a priest performing a sacrifice).

³² There is one exception described in the ethnographic record, which merits a brief detour. In much of Georgia, especially in the lowlands, St. Barbara is invoked in prayers for children sick with the infectious diseases — especially smallpox — euphemistically known to the Georgians as the bat’onebi, lit. “lords”, since these illnesses are believed to be sent by God himself [Bleichsteiner 1954; Bardavelidze 1941b]. As in the traditional medical practices of many European countries, St. Barbara is imagined as a patron of healing, and in particular who intercedes for victims of smallpox and lightning strike. One medieval Georgian hagiography, cited by Mindadze [2000: 254], characterizes her as “as a special helper of those sick from smallpox (sak’utar meoxed q’vavilisa sneulebisatvis), in accordance with her being a helper in times of fire and the appearance of lightning (cecxlisa žamisa da mexisagan gardačenisatvis), and in general as a protector from unexpected death”. In Pkhovi, however, prayers in times of a smallpox outbreak are directed not to St. Barbara, but rather to the powerful male-gendered deity K’viria, divine mediator between the remote supreme God and human society (“K’viria, whose tent is pitched in God’s court, relieve us from this illness spawned by God [es xtisagan gamašobili saržielni]”). The intervention of K’viria, rather than K’op’ala or Iaqsar, is consistent with the belief that smallpox is brought by angels sent by God himself, rather than by “demons” easily subdued by K’op’ala’s imposing physical force [Mindadze 1979; 2000: 246-252]. Should the disease continue to spread unabated, a special ceremony is performed, called saymto-sak’viriao “for God, for K’viria”. Beer is brewed, and meat- and cheese-filled breads (“plague offerings”, žam-sac’ir) are baked. A ram is sacrificed to God, whereas a goat (or kid) is offered to K’viria [Mindadze 1979]. The choice of sacrifice to K’viria reflects both his subordinate status relative to God, and possibly as well an echo of the West Caucasian practices described earlier in this paper. Goat sacrifice is also practiced at a handful of Pshav and Xevsur shrines specifically dedicated to Elia, where the community prays for the protection of their crops from hail and adverse weather. At the small Xevsur shrine to Elia near Xaxabos Jvari, a goat-kid is sacrificed on the second day of the principal summer festival of Atengena (late July). The meat is cut from the bones without breaking them, then cooked. After the goat meat has been eaten, the bones are collected and set inside the goat-skin, which is hung from a long pole on a mountain-top. The intention is remind the subordinate spirits who bring hail that “a goat-kid has been killed for Elia, and therefore

The “sworn sisters”, and sometimes other types of subordinate spirits, are represented at each Pkhovian shrine complex, with characterizations and functions contrasting distinctly from those of the resident xvtisšvili. At some distance from the latter’s sanctuary, which is considered particularly “pure” ground, off limits to women, are one or more shrines where offerings are presented to such female spirits as the “Place Mother” (adgilis deda), the “Mother of God” (yvtismšobeli), or the “sworn sister(s)” (dobili) of the xvtisšvili. Men, and especially women, petition these deities for the health and fertility of people and livestock, and for a safe childbirth. Although a source of benefit to the community, the “sworn sisters” of the xvtisšvili are imagined to be capable of visiting disease (especially childhood illnesses) upon people, as well as preventing it, and, more importantly, as having a “demonic” side to their character, which can surface at any time. At some villages in northern Khevsureti are the ruined shrines of deities which “turn into demons (ešmak’ad gadaikceva) when people stop praying to them. If earlier they could help people, now they are only capable of causing harm” [Ochiauri 1988: 194-5]. These so-called “grounded” (gamic’rivlebuli) spirits are the residents of shrines abandoned by the community who, angered by neglect and the lack of offerings, turn into harmful beings of female gender believed to inflict illness upon children who hazard too close to their ruined sanctuaries. The same ambiguous, potentially demonic, nature characterizes other supernatural auxiliaries of the Pkhovian xvtisšvilni. Some of these are believed to be accompanied by invisible hunting dogs (mc’evarni) or an army of wolf-like “enforcers” (iasauli), which they would unleash upon “vassals” who somehow provoked their anger [Javaxishvili 1960: 136-137; Bardavelidze 1957: 22; Charachidzé 1968: 298-299; Mindadze 2000: 146].³³ The guard snake (gvelisperi) which patrols K’op’ala’s sacred hops field appears to be a creature of the same sort. After massacring the ogres, K’op’ala was said to have kept one alive, chained up under a cliff at the end of a valley near Ak’usho. He would use this ogre as an enforcer, releasing him to punish those who incurred his wrath [Ochiauri 1991: 99].

What these auxiliary spirits have in common is a close association with a male xvtisšvili, in whose shrine complex they reside, and a dangerous nature which is ordinarily exploited by their superior as an instrument of punishment. The two sides, beneficial and harmful, of the lightning god of the western Caucasian peoples are distributed between two contrastive and complementary sets of supernatural beings in the Pkhovian religious system: the positive-valued, exclusively male xvtisšvili, and their ambiguously-valued female, animal or monstrous auxiliaries. As a preliminary working hypothesis, which I intend to examine in further fieldwork in highland Georgia, I propose that the segmentation of positive and ambiguous divine traits, and their projection onto two sets of spirits, was an innovation of the Pkhovian reform, consistent with the rigorous “binarization” of religious and social ideology which gave rise to the system described by 19th- and early 20th-century Georgian ethnographers. This hypothesis offers a new perspective on the soul-liberation function attributed to K’op’ala. The cluster of traits comprising the representations of Wacilla and the other lightning gods of the western Caucasus — random selection and appropriation of a victim, whose soul will have a privileged relation to the deity, and appeasement with a goat sacrifice — are

Elia does not give them permission to destroy the crops, for he is the chief patron of the sky and clouds (ca-yrubelt uprosi mmartveli)” [Ruxadze 1991: 97-107].

³³ The term iasauli, which referred to a type of agent sent to enforce royal decrees in medieval Georgia, is ultimately from Mongol jasau’ul, an assistant or adjutant officer [P. Golden, pers. comm.]

divided between the Pkhovian demons, who play a fundamentally negative role, and the divinized hero K'op'ala, whose intervention is purely positive.

While the Pkhovian priests preside at public rituals, the oracles are the power behind the throne. The oracles, who were almost always men, communicated the *xvtisšvili*'s instructions to the community. He — or rather the deity speaking through him — selected the shrine officials, chose the site for new shrine buildings, diagnosed the cause of illnesses, and predicted the future [Charachidzé 1968: 169-186]. Like the priest, he was subjected to heavy obligations to maintain ritual purity; also like the priest, he was selected directly by the *xvtisšvili*, although he was usually patrilineally descended from previous oracles [op. cit., 122-123]. The ethnographic accounts of a century or so ago, as well as those collected by me in recent years, reflect an opposition — indeed, a *tension* — in Pkhovian representations of the role of the (almost always male) oracle and the roles of other types of possessed individuals, most of whom were female. Although oracles went into trances, and some manifested the frenzied movements and disordered speech (*yabuši*) typical of possession, they acquired a degree of control over their communicative function, and could go into spokesman mode — with or without signs of psychic agitation — when it was called for [op. cit., 153-154, 199-201]. Female possession was usually diagnosed as punishment for some real or imagined sin against the deity, and tended to be sporadic and involuntary. In the highlands, women seers did exist, but their role was limited to contact with the souls of the dead (*mesultane*) or the diagnosis of certain types of ailment (*mk'itxavi*). In the lowland communities of eastern Georgia, mostly former satellite villages of Pkhovian origin, female oracles are fairly numerous, but they are viewed with disdain and mistrust by highland shrine officials. As in the highlands, these women regard their possession as punishment for sin rather than as a sign of divine election [Bardavelidze 1941a; Charachidzé 1968: 187-201; author's fieldnotes].

Consistent with the increasing dominance of the priest and oracle in the religious life of the Pkhovian community was an increased specialization of religious knowledge, in the form of elaborate prayers and invocations (lengthy and complicated texts containing lists of deities, often imbedded in more-or-less garbled fragments from the Orthodox liturgy or the Gospels), and precise norms concerning the performance of purifications and sacrifices, the preparation of ritual breads, the handling of grain from the shrine's fields, and so forth. This was expressed at the level of social and religious ideology in the form of the thorough-going, crystalline binarism — unequalled elsewhere in the Caucasus — that has fascinated ethnographers for over a century. The shrine officials, especially those with a lifetime vocation, were required to attain and maintain a level of “purity” — avoidance of the proximity of women at certain times of year, abstention from certain foods, regular and costly purificatory sacrifices — that was beyond the reach of rank-and-file community members. The increasing systematization, regulation and specialization of the Pkhovian religious order, I hypothesize, made the role of a lightning god with the properties of Slavic Perun"/Kupala, Abkhazian Afə or Ossetic Wacilla particularly problematic. Such a deity represented, in effect, those aspects of sacrifice and possession which the Pkhovian hierarchy sought to bring under its control. The Indo-European and western Caucasian storm gods struck whenever, wherever and whomever they chose, seizing victims without waiting for the community to take the initiative of making a sacrifice. They also took the initiative in selecting their prophets, i.e.

those lightning-strike victims who survived, and perhaps (as the Abkhazian data implies) individuals suffering from certain mental disorders. To conceive a divine being in such terms would imply certain limits on the human community's control over exchanges with the divine world, both in the form of sacrifice and in the form of communication through authorized spokespeople. As a consequence of the Pkhovian reform, in a sense, the gods retain the appearance of omnipotence while in fact ceding some of their authority to specialist priests and oracles drawn from particular patrilineages in the community.

The socioreligious order observed in 20th-century Pkhovi bears a certain resemblance to that of what R. Hamayon has labelled “pastoral shamanism” in a diachronic study of the religious institutions of the Buryat tribes of Siberia [Hamayon 1996]. By contrast with the earlier “hunting shamanism”, in which the shaman, through his status as the “son-in-law” of supernatural game-giving spirits, played an integral role in assuring the success of hunters, in pastoralist Buryat societies the shamanic function has been subordinated to a patrilineally organized ancestor-based religious order. The primary ritual specialists have come to be more like priests, responsible for making offerings of domestic-animal meat and dairy products, or have given way to the clergy of Lamaistic Buddhism. Of particular interest is the peripheralization and feminization of shamanism among the Buryats: Most shamans are now female, their sphere of activity limited to private matters such as dealing with the troublesome wandering souls of people who died unnatural or premature deaths. In the case of the Caucasus, it should be noted that there is little evidence of an institution comparable to Buryat “hunting shamanism”, although one might discern similarities between the Pkhovian ballads of the goddess Samdzimari sharing the bed of certain legendary oracles, and the Buryat belief that the shaman had a supernatural wife of animal origin [Charachidzé 1968: 142-144; Hamayon 1996]. What is common to both cases is the evident marginalization of “horizontal” inspirational practices — those which are available, in principle, to any member of the society, and which are marked by trance and possession — in favor of the institution of “vertical” inspiration, based on esoteric knowledge controlled by priest-like specialists, a phenomenon which often accompanies increasing sociopolitical complexification and centralization [Hugh-Jones 1996]. Although Pkhovi remained a relatively egalitarian society in most respects, the authority and prestige held by the chief priests and their oracles led some Soviet-period ethnographers to employ such terms as “aristocracy” or “theocracy” [Bardavelidze 1957: 34-36]. Some of this authority, it appears, came at the expense of the peripheralization and feminization of random (or self-selected) possession in favor of quasi-hereditary oracles, accompanied by the “domestication” of a redoubtable thunderbolt-slinging storm god as K'op'ala, ogre-slayer and liberator of lost souls. One wonders — and it is a question that goes far beyond the modest bounds of this paper — whether the restructuring of Pkhovian society rendered it particularly capable of resisting the increasing hegemony of political formations to the north, south and east, or whether, on the contrary, the restructuring was itself the fruit of that spirit of resistance.

V. Some thoughts on the etymology of čoppa.

The origins of the lexeme čoppa and its variants remain uncertain. Several accounts specify that the meaning of this vocable was unknown to the people performing the ritual, and Abaev qualifies the Ossetic coppay as “of obscure origin” in his etymological dictionary. Abaev conjectures that coppay contains a final “vocative” -ay, an element he has also isolated in (w)onay, a vocable in the

refrain of a women's cloth-fulling song, formed from (w)on, the name of St. John, + -ay [1958 II: 228]. This would lead one to suppose that copp- represents, or represented at one time, the name or epithet of a divine being. In this final section, I will undertake the preliminary investigation of a possible source for čoppa/coppay, following up on a suggestion made to me by David Testen [pers. comm., 8 May 2000]. Testen wondered if there could be some connection between čoppa and the Ossetic verb root cæv-yn “beat, strike” [Abaev 1958 I: 306-7], which appears in the compound ærv-dzav-d- “struck by lightning” (with assimilative voicing of the initial consonant). The etymology of cæv- is difficult to establish, however, not for lack of possible cognates, but rather because there appear to be too many, including a large number from outside of the Indo-European family. Numerous Turkic languages have verb roots descended from an antecedent *čap, denoting various sorts of “noisy action” [Clauson 1972: 394; Räsänen 1969: 99], most commonly involving striking or attacking. Abaev also mentions Mongolian čab “beat” and Komi (Permic branch of Finno-Ugric) čap-yny “strike”. Indo-European examples include Persian čâpîdan “plunder” (a loan from Turkish, according to Doerfer [1967 III: 15-16]) and Russian capat' “snatch, strike”. Doerfer and Clauson regard these roots as onomatopoeic in origin. Of similar phonetic form and meaning are the expressive Indic roots grouped by Turner [1966: 265, root #4863] under the lemma *cupp-/co:pp-/cump- “strike”, e.g. Waigali chúp “wound”, Bengali cop “blow”, copâra “slap”; note also Bengali chop(a) “sudden attack”, chopa- “to snatch” [Sen ***]. These Indic lexemes are particularly close in form, including vocalism, to west Caucasian čoppa. The IE, Altaic and Finno-Ugric expressive roots described here have geographic rather than family-specific distribution. They are attested within and around the great central-Eurasian linguistic “spread zone” [Nichols 1992, 1997], which has been the site of the relatively rapid westward expansions of IE, Iranian, Turkic and Mongolian, and perhaps other language groups in the more remote past. In one form or another, perhaps as an epithet meaning “the striker”, a reflex of the onomatopoeic Wanderwort čap-/čop(p)- came to be attached to the lightning god of one of the steppe peoples — perhaps, but not necessarily, Iranian-speaking — even as the IE root *per-(k^w)-u- “strike” surfaced in the names of Baltic Perkunas and Slavic Perun". In this way, čop(p)- “strike” was linked to the West Caucasian lightning deity, as is still the case among the Karachays, and thence to the song and round dance performed around his victims.³⁴

³⁴ Possibly related to čoppa(y) is the name of a round dance known in western Iran and Kurdistan as [Persian] čupi “tanec s platkami (rasprostraněn v zapadnoj chasti Irana, ispolnjaetsja mužchinami i ženshchinami, stavshimi v krug)”, [Kurdish] çopî “(juzhno-kurdscoe) tanec s podprijivaniem” [Miller 1960: 167; Kurdoev 1960: 173]. One intriguing clue is the use of the latter word in the expression çopî çemer bestin “gather round corpse for mourning dance” [Wahby & Edmonds 1966], which suggests a link to the performance of the čoppa dance around the body of a lightning-strike victim. Little more can be said concerning such a link without more detailed descriptions of these dances and their antecedent forms.

REFERENCES.

- Abaev, Vasili I. 1949. *Osetinskij jazyk i fol'klor*. Moscow, Izd. Akad. Nauk SSSR
- —. 1958-1989. *Istoriko-etimologičeskij slovar' osetinskogo jazyka*. (vols I-V). Moskva: Akad. nauk SSSR.
- —. 1964. *A grammatical sketch of Ossetic*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- —. 1965. *Skifo-evropeiskie izoglossy na styke Vostoka i Zapada*. Moskva: Nauka, Glavnaja redakcija vostočnoj literatury.
- Abak'elia, Nino. 1991. *Mif i ritual v Zapadnoj Gruzii*. Tbilisi: Mecniereba.
- Akaba, Lili X. 1967. O nekotoryx religioznyx perežitkax u abxazov. *Sovremennoe abxazskoe selo. Ètnografičeskie očerki*. L. X. Akaba & Sh. D. Inal-ipa, ed. Tbilisi. Mecniereba, 27-51.
- —. 1984. *Istoričeskie korni arxaicheskix ritualov abxazov*. Suxumi, Alashara.
- —. 1991. Ancva. MNM I: 90
- Ardzinba, V. G. 1988. K istorii kulta železa i kuznečnogo remesla (počitanie kuznicy u abxazov). *Drevnij Vostok. Ètnokul'turnye svjazi*, ed. G. M. Bongard-Levin & V. Ardzinba, pp 263-306. Moscow: Nauka.
- Averincev, S. S. 1991. Ioann Krestitel'. MNM I: 551-3.
- Baliauri, M. & Mak'alatia, N. 1940. micvalebulis k'ult'i arxot'is temši [The cult of the dead in the commune of Arkhot'i]. *Masalebi sakartvelos etnografiisatvis* III: 1-64.
- Bardavelidze, Vera. 1941a. Ivris pšavlebši (dyiuri). *ENIMK'-is moambe* VII: 67-182.
- —. 1941b. Kartvelta udzvelesi sarc'munoebis ist'oriidan: vtaeba barbar-babar (From the history of the most ancient beliefs of the Georgians: the deity Barbar-Babar). Tbilisi: Mecniereba
- —. 1957. *Drevnejšie religioznye verovanija i obrjadovoe grafičeskoe iskusstvo gruzinskix plemen*. Tbilisi: Mecniereba.
- Basilov, V. N. and Kobychev, V. P. 1976. Nikolaji kuvd (Osetinskoe prazdničestvo v čest' patrona selenija). *Kavkazskij ètnografičeskij sbornik* VI: 131-154.
- Benet, Sula. 1974. *Abkhassians: the long-living people of the Caucasus*. NY: Holt, Rinehart & Wilson
- Benveniste, Émile. 1959. *Études sur la langue ossète*. Paris: Klincksieck.
- —. 1969. *Le vocabulaire des institutions indo-européennes, 2. Pouvoir, droit, religion*. Paris: Éditions de Minuit.
- —. 1973. *Origines de la formation des noms en indo-européen*. Paris: Adrien-Maisonneuve.
- Bgazhba, X. 1991. Aytar. MNM I: 55.
- Biezais, Haralds. 1975. Baltische Religion. *Germanische und Baltische Religion*. (Die Religionen der Menschheit 19,1). Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, pp 307-384.
- Bleichsteiner, Robert. 1954. Die Blatterngottheiten und die Hl. Barbara im Volksglauben der Georgiern. *Kultur und Volk. Beiträge zur Volkskunde aus Österreich, Bayern und der Schweiz*, ed. Leopold Schmidt. Wien: Österreichische Museum für Volkskunde, pp. 63-83.
- Burkert, Walter. 1961. Elysiion. *Glotta* 39: 208-213
- Charachidzé, Georges. 1968. *Le système religieux de la Géorgie païenne: analyse structurale d'une civilisation*. Paris: Maspero.
- —. 1971. *Introduction à l'étude de la féodalité géorgienne: le Code de Georges le Brillant*. Paris: Librairie Droz.
- —. 1981a. Caucase du Nord. *Dictionnaire des mythologies et des religions des sociétés*

- traditionnelles et du monde antique.* (ed. Yves Bonnefoy). Vol 1: 129-132. Paris: Flammarion.
- —. 1981b. Géorgie. La religion et les mythes des Géorgiens de la montagne. *Dictionnaire des mythologies et des religions des sociétés traditionnelles et du monde antique.* (ed. Yves Bonnefoy). Vol 1, pp 451-459. Paris: Flammarion.
- —. 1986. *Prométhée ou le Caucase.* Paris: Flammarion.
- —. 1987. *La mémoire indo-européenne du Caucase.* Paris: Hachette.
- Chartolani, Mixeil. 1961. *kartveli xalxis mat'erialuri k'ult'uris ist'oriidan.* (From the history of the material culture of the Georgian people). Tbilisi: Mecniereba.
- Chikovani, Mixeil. 1966. *Narodnyj gruzinskij èpos o prikovannom Amirani.* Moscow: Nauka, Glavnaja redakcija vostočnoj literatury.
- —, ed. 1972. *Kartuli xalxuri p'oezia, 1: mitologiuri leksebi, nak'veti p'irveli.* (Georgian folk poetry, vol 1: Mythological poems, Part I.) Tbilisi: Metsniereba.
- Clauson, Gerard. 1972. *Etymological dictionary of pre-13th-century Turkish.* London: Oxford University Press.
- Cook, A. B. 1965. *Zeus: A study in ancient religion.* New York: Biblo and Tannen.
- Dalgat, Bashir. 1893. *Pervobytnaja religija čečencev.* Terskii sbornik III #2.2: 41-132. Vladikavkaz: Terskij oblastnoj statističeskij komitet.
- Dalgat, U. B. 1972. *Geroičeskij èpos čečencev i ingušej.* Moskva: Nauka.
- Dasxuranc'i, Movses. 1961. *History of the Caucasian Albanians,* C. J. F. Dowsett, tr. London: Oxford University Press.
- Doerfer, G. 1967. *Türkische und mongolische Elemente im Neupersischen.* Wiesbaden: ***
- Dumézil, Georges. 1978. *Romans de Scythie et d'alentour.* Paris: Payot.
- —. 1986. *Les dieux souverains des Indo-Européens.* Paris: Gallimard.
- —. 1995. *Mythe et épopée I, II, III.* Paris: Gallimard.
- Eliade, Mircea. 1977. *Forgerons et alchimistes.* Paris: Flammarion.
- Evans-Pritchard, E. E. 1956. *Nuer religion.* London: Oxford University Press.
- EWC = *The encyclopedia of world cultures, Volume VI: Russia and Eurasia / China,* edited by P. Friedrich and N. Diamond, volume eds.; D. Levinson, chief ed. Boston: G.K. Hall and Co.
- Fedorov, Ja. A. 1972. *Xazarija i Dagestan.* Kavkazskij ètnografičeskij sbornik V: 18-40.
- Gadzhev, M. G. 1991. *Rannezemledel'českaja kul'tura severo-vostočnogo Kavkaza. Èpoxa èneolita i rannej bronzy.* Moscow: Nauka.
- Gamkrelidze, T. & Ivanov, V. 1984. *Indoevropskij jazyk i indoevropcejcy.* Tbilisi State University Press.
- Gej, A. N. 1996. Èneolit-bronzovyj vek Kavkaza. Ètnolingvističeskie rekonstrukcii i arxeologičeskie materialy. *Aktual'nye problemy arxeologii Severnogo Kavkaza. XIX Krupnovskie chtenija,* pp 56-58. Moscow: Rossijskaja Akad. Nauk, Institut arxeologii.
- Gimbutas, Marina. 1971. *The Slavs.* London: Thames and Hudson.
- Gołąb, Zbigniew. 1994. Prehistoric contacts between Ossetic and Slavic. *The Non-Slavic Languages of the USSR. Studies in the Linguistics of Caucasia in Memory of Akaki Shanidze,* H. Aronson, ed., pp 120-129. Columbus, Ohio: Slavica.
- Golden, Peter. 1980. *Khazar studies: an historico-philological inquiry into the origins of the Khazars.* Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó.
- —. 1992. *An introduction to the history of the Turkic peoples: ethnogenesis and state-formation*

- in medieval and early modern Eurasia and the Middle East*. Wiesbaden: O. Harrassowitz.
- —. 1998. Religion among the Qipchaqs of Medieval Eurasia. *Central Asiatic Journal* 42 #2: 180-237.
- Goniashvili, Tinatin. 1971. kartvelta da naxta k'ult'uruli k'ont'akt'idan. *K'avk'asiis etnografiuli k'rebuli* III: 213-218
- Gulia, Dyrmit. 1928. Kul't kozla (ašt'a) u abxazov. *Sobranie sochinenij*, t. VI: 283-292.
- Haas, Volkert. 1994. *Geschichte der hethitischen Religion*. Leiden: E. J. Brill.
- Hamayon, Roberte. 1996. Shamanism in Siberia: from partnership in supernature to counter-power in society. N. Thomas & C. Humphrey, eds. *Shamanism, history and the state*, Ann Arbor: U Mich Press, pp 76-89.
- Hubert, Henri and Mauss, Marcel. 1898/1968. *Essai sur la nature et la fonction du sacrifice*, [originally published in *L'Année sociologique*, 1898]. In *Oeuvres de Marcel Mauss*, vol. I; Paris: Editions de Minuit.
- Hugh-Jones, Stephen. 1996. Shamans, prophets, priest and pastors. N. Thomas & C. Humphrey, eds. *Shamanism, history and the state*, Ann Arbor: U Mich Press, pp 32-75.
- Inal-Ipa, Shalva D. 1965. *Abxazcy. Istoriko-ètnografičeskie očerki*. Suxumi: Alashara.
- —. 1971. *Stranicy istoričeskoj ètnografii abxazov*. Suxumi: Alashara.
- Ivanov, Vjacheslav Vs. 1991. Ilija. *MNM* I: 505-6.
- Ivanov, Vjacheslav Vs. and Toporov, Vladimir N. 1965. *Slavjanskije jazykovye modelirujuščie semiotičeskie sistemy*. Moskva : Nauka.
- — and — —. 1970. Le mythe indo-européen du dieu de l'orage poursuivant le serpent. Pouillon, Jean et Maranda, Pierre, dirs. *Échanges et communications; mélanges offerts à Claude Lévi-Strauss à l'occasion de son 60e anniversaire*. The Hague: Mouton, pp 1180-1206.
- — and — —. 1974. *Issledovanija v oblasti slavjanskix drevnostej : leksich. i frazeol. voprosy rekonstruktsii tekstov*. Moskva : Nauka.
- — and — —. 1991a. Baltijskaja mifologija. *MNM* I: 151-158
- — and — —. 1991b. Vala. *MNM* I: 210.
- — and — —. 1991c. Veles, Vels. *MNM* I: 227-229.
- — and — —. 1991d. Indoevropskaja mifologija. *MNM* I: 527-533.
- — and — —. 1991e. Kupala. *MNM* II: 29.
- — and — —. 1991f. Perkunas. *MNM* II: 303-4.
- — and — —. 1991g. Perun. *MNM* II: 306-7.
- — and — —. 1991h. Slavjanskaja mifologija. *MNM* II: 450-456
- Ixilov, M. M. 1967. *Narodnosti lezginskoj gruppi*. Maxachkala: Dagestan. filial AN SSSR
- Jakobson, Roman. 1985a. Slavic gods and demons. *Selected Works* VII: 3-11.
- —. 1985b. Linguistic evidence in comparative mythology. *Selected Works* VII: 12-32.
- —. 1985c. The Slavic god Volos" and his Indo-European cognates *Selected Works* VII: 33-48.
- Javakhishvili, Ivane. 1960. *Kartveli eris ist'oria* [The history of the Georgian people] (5th edition). Tbilisi: Tbilisi State University Press
- Kaloev, Boris A. 1971. *Osetiny*. Moscow: Nauka.
- —. 1989. Osetinsko-vajnaxskie ètnokul'turnye svjazi. *Kavkazskij ètnografičeskij sbornik* IX: 137-158.
- Kantaria, Medea. 1964. sameurneo q'opis ist'oriidan q'abardoši. [From the history of agricultural

- practice in Kabardia]. *K'avk'asiis etnograpiuli k'rebuli I*: 53-99. Tbilisi: Mecniereba.
- —. 1982. *q'abardoelebis sameurneo q'opis ist'oriidan*. [From the history of Kabardian agricultural practice]. Tbilisi: Mecniereba.
- Karaketov, M. D. 1995. *Iz tradicionnoj obrjadovo-kul'tovoj žizni karačaevev*. Moscow.
- K'ik'nadze, Zurab. 1996. *kartuli mitologia, I. jvari da saq'mo*. [Georgian mythology, I. Shrine and community]. Kutaisi: Gelati Academy of Sciences.
- —. ms. Unpublished corpus of *andrezebi* (Pkhovian shrine-foundation myths), Zurab K'ik'nadze, ed.
- Klimov 1991. Some thoughts on Indo-European-Kartvelian relations. *Journal of Indo-European Studies* 19 #3-4: 325-341.
- Koleva, Tatjana. 1974. Sur l'origine de la fête de St-Georges chez les Slaves du sud. *Ethnologia Slavica* (Bratislava) VI: 147-173.
- Kosven, M. O. *et alii*. 1960. *Narody Kavkaza, I. Severnyj Kavkaz*. Moscow: Nauka.
- Kurdoev, K. K. 1960. *Kurdsko-russkij slovar'*. Moskva: Gosud. izd-vo inostrannyx i nacional'nyx slovarej.
- Lincoln, Bruce. 1981. *Priests, warriors and cattle: a study in the ecology of religions*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Mak'alatia, Mzia. 1979. mesakonleobastan dakavširebuli rc'mena-c'armodgenebi samegreloši. [Beliefs and representations related to livestock breeding in Mingrelia]. *Masalebi samegrelos etnograpiisatvis*, 62-85. Tbilisi: Mecniereba.
- Mak'alatia, Sergi. 1987. *mtis rač'a*. Tbilisi: Nak'aduli.
- Mal'sagov, A. U. 1991. Elta. MNM I: 433.
- Mayrhofer, Manfred. 1991. *Etymologisches Wörterbuch des Altindoarischen*. Heidelberg: Indogermanische Bibliothek.
- Miller, B. V. 1960. *Persidsko-russkij slovar'*. Moskva: Gosud. izd-vo inostrannyx i nacional'nyx slovarej.
- Mindadze, Nunu. 1979. bavšvta inpekciur daavadebebtan dakavširebuli c'es-čveulebebi da rc'mena-c'armodgenebi pšav-xevsuretši. [Customs, beliefs and representations related to children's infectious diseases in Pshav-Khevsureti]. *Masalebi sakartvelos etnograpiisatvis XX*: 122-128.
- —. 1981. *kartuli xalxuri medicina* [Georgian folk medicine]. Tbilisi: Mecniereba.
- —. 2000. *kartuli xalxuri samedicino k'ult'ura* [Georgian folk medical culture]. unpublished PhD thesis, Georgian Academy of Sciences, Institute of History and Ethnography.
- MNM = Tokarev, S. A., ed. 1991. *Mify narodov mira*. Moskva : Sovetskaja enciklopedia.
- Morgenstierne, Georg. 1927. *Etymological vocabulary of Pashto*. Oslo.
- Nagy, Gregory. 1990. *Greek mythology and poetics*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press
- Nichols, Johanna. 1992. *Linguistic diversity in space and time*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- —. 1997. The epicenter of the Indo-European linguistic spread. *Archaeology and language, I. Theoretical and methodological orientations*, edited by Roger Blench and Matthew Spriggs, 122-148. London: Routledge.
- Nilsson, Martin P. 1941. *Geschichte der griechischen Religion*, vol. I. München: C. H. Beck.
- Nizharadze, Besarion. 1962. *Ist'oriul-etnograpiuli c'erilebi, I*. [Historical-ethnographic essays]. Tbilisi: Tbilisi University Press.

- Ochiauri, Aleksi. 1988. *kartuli xalxuri dyeobebis k'alendari: xevsureti* [The calendar of Georgian folk holidays: Khevsureti]. Tbilisi: Mecniereba.
- —. 1991. *kartuli xalxuri dyeobebi ayomosavlet sakartvelos mtianetši (pšavi)* [Folk holidays in the East Georgian mountains: Pshavi]. Tbilisi: Mecniereba.
- Ochiauri, Tinatin. 1967. *mitologiuri gadmocemebi ayomosavlet sakartvelos mtianetši*. [Mythological traditions in the East Georgian highlands]. Tbilisi: Mecniereba.
- —. 1991. Iaxsari. MNM I: 477.
- Olsen, Birgit Anette. 1999. *The noun in Biblical Armenian: origin and word formation, with special emphasis on the Indo-European heritage*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter,
- Pershits, A. I., ed. 1989. *Abaziny: istoriko-ètnograficheskie ocherk*. Cherkessk: Karachaevo-Cherkesskoe otd-nie Stavropolskogo knizhnogo izd-va, 1989
- Pokorny, Julius. 1959. *Indogermanisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*. Bern: Francke.
- Polomé, Edgar. 1997. Smith god. *Encyclopedia of Indo-European cultures*, ed. D. Q. Adams & J. P. Mallory. Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn.
- Preobrazhenskii, Aleksandr Grigor'evich. 1959. *Etimologičeskii slovar' russkogo jazyka*. Moskva: Gosud. izd-vo inostrannyx i nacional'nyx slovarej.
- Propp, V. Ja. 1963. *Russkie agrarnye prazdniki*. Leningrad: Izd. Leningradskogo Universiteta.
- Puhvel, Jaan. 1989. *Comparative mythology*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins.
- Räsänen, Marti. 1969. Versuch eines etymologischen Wörterbuchs der Türkssprachen.
- Rix, Helmut et al. 1998. *Lexikon der indogermanischen Verben*. Wiesbaden: Dr. Ludwig Reichert Verlag.
- Ruxadze, Juljeta. 1999. *bunebis dzalta ayordzinebis xalxuri dyesasc'auli sakartveloši*. [The Georgian folk festival of the revival of nature]. Tbilisi: Mecniereba.
- Rybakov, Boris A. 1987. *Jazičestvo drevnej Rusi*. Moscow: Nauka.
- —. 1994. *Le paganisme des anciens Slaves*. Paris: PUF.
- Sahlins, Marshall. 1981. *Historical metaphors and mythical realities: structure in the early history of the Sandwich Islands kingdom*. Ann Arbor: University Of Michigan Press.
- —. 1994. Goodbye to Tristes Tropes: Ethnography in the context of modern world history. *Assessing cultural anthropology*, ed. Robert Borofsky, pp 377-393. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Sen, Sukumar. *** Etymological dictionary of Bengali. Calcutta: Eastern Publishers.
- Sergent, Bernard. 1997. *Genèse de l'Inde*. Paris: Payot.
- Shamanov, Ibragim M. 1994. Balkars. EWC VI: 51-54.
- Shu, Sh. S. 1964. Muzyka i tancival'noe iskusstvo. *Kul'tura i byt kolxonzogo krestjanstva Adygejskoj Avtonomnoj Oblasti*, ed. M. G. Autlev & L. I. Lavrov, pp. 177-195. Moskva: Nauka.
- Tankiev, A. X. 1991. Sela. MNM II: 423-424.
- Taq'aishvili, Ekvtime. 1991. *Emigrant'uli nashromebi, II. arkeologiuri eksp'edicia lechxumsvanetshi 1910 c'els*. Tbilisi: Mecniereba.
- Testen, David. Toasting guests and hosting pests: Georgian *alaverdi* and Ossetian *Alardy*. To appear in the Festschrift for Howard I. Aronson.
- Topchishvili, Roland. 1981. sak'ult'o dzeglebi rogorc c'q'aro ayomosavlet sakartvelos mtis mosaxleobis migraciis šesasc'avlad. [Cultic monuments as a source for the study of the migration of the population of the East Georgian highlands]. *Masalebi sakartvelos etnografiisatvis XXI*: 99-107.

- —. 1984. *aymosavlet sakartvelos mtis mosaxleobis migracia XVII-XX ss-ši*. [Migration of the populations of the East Georgian highlands in the 17th-20th centuries]. Tbilisi: Mecniereba
- Toporov, V. 1991. Indra. MNM I: 533-535.
- Trautmann, Reinhold. 1923. *Baltisch-Slavisch Wörterbuch*. Göttingen: Vanhoeck & Ruprecht.
- Tuite, K. 1994. *Anthology of Georgian folk poetry*. Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson Univ. Press.
- —. 1996. Highland Georgian paganism — archaism or innovation? *Annual of the Society for the Study of Caucasia* #7, pp 79-91.
- —. 1998. Representations of social space in South Caucasian and Indo-European ideology. *Cosmos* 14 #1: 9-20.
- —. 1999. Real and imagined feudalism in highland Georgia. (presented at AAA 1999).
- —. 2000. Anti-marriage in ancient Georgian society. *Anthropological Linguistics* 42 #1: 37-60.
- Tuite, K. and P'aat'a Bukhrashvili. 1999. Binarität und Komplementarität in Nordostgeorgien. Die Vorstellung von Jungen und Mädchen am Iaqsari-Heiligtum. *Georgica* #22: 59-72.
- Tuite, K. and Wolfgang Schulze. 1999. A case of taboo-motivated lexical replacement in the indigenous languages of the Caucasus. *Anthropological Linguistics* 40 #3: 363-383.
- Turner, R. L. 1966. *A comparative dictionary of the Indo-Aryan languages*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Valeri, Valerio. 1985. *Kingship and sacrifice: ritual and society in ancient Hawaii*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Vasmer, Max. 1953. *Russisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*. Heidelberg: Winter, 1953-1958
- Vazha-Pshavela 1889/1994. k'op'ala da iaxsari — devebis mebrdzolni. *Txzulebani*, V: 133-137.
- Vielle, Christophe. 1997. *Le mytho-cycle héroïque dans l'aire indo-européenne*. Louvain-la-Neuve: Peeters.
- Virsaladze, Elene. 1976. *Gruzinskij oxotničij mif i poëzija*. Moscow: Nauka, Glavnaja redakcija vostočnoj literatury.
- Volkova, Natalia. 1989. Ètnokul'turnye kontakty narodov Gornogo Kavkaza v obščestvennom byte (XIX — načalo XX v.). *Kavkazskij ètnografičeskij sbornik* IX: 159-215.
- —. 1994. Khinalugh. EWC VI: 197-202.
- Wahby, Taufiq & Edmonds, C. J. 1966. *Kurdish-English dictionary*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Xaradze, Rusudan & Robakidze, Al. 1964. *svanetis sopeli dzvelad*. [The Svanetian village in earlier times]. Tbilisi: Sabch'ota Sakartvelo.
- Xorgwiani, K'uzmi. 1894. Why there is a snowy season in Svaneti, *SMOMPK* 18 #2.
- Zelenin, D. K. 1991. *Vostočnoslavjanskaja ètnografija*. Moscow: Nauka, Glavnaja redakcija vostočnoj literatury.
- Zempléni, Andras. 1987. Des êtres sacrificiels. *Sous le masque de l'animal : essais sur le sacrifice en Afrique noire*, ed. Michel Cartry. Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 267-317.

Lightning, sacrifice and possession in the traditional religions of the Caucasus.

Kevin Tuite

Université de Montréal

An earlier (and abridged) version of this paper was presented at the 10th Colloquium of the Societas Caucasologica Europæa, at the University of Munich, 5 August 2000. I have profited greatly from the comments and criticisms offered by Pat'i Antadze-Malashkhia, Pilip'e Baghauri, P'aat'a Bukhrashvili, Slava Chikiba, John Colarusso, Peter Golden, Michael Job, Mzia Mak'alatia, Nunu Mindadze, Tinatin Ochiauri, David Testen, Rémy Viredaz, although I remain responsible for any errors of omission or commission. Any further comments, of course, will be much appreciated.

Kevin Tuite

Département d'anthropologie

Université de Montréal

Case postale 6128, Succursale centre-ville

Montréal, Québec H3C 3J7, Canada

tuitekj@anthro.umontreal.ca [e-mail]