

Abkhaz

also known as “Apswa (self-designation)”, “Abkhazy”, “Abazintsy (Russian)”

Data source: eHRAF

Secondary source

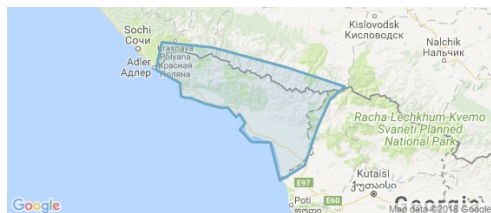
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** Secondary Source entry, prepared from a literature review by a Ph.D. RA*

Entry tags: Religion, Christian Traditions, Orthodox/Eastern Christian, Islamic Traditions, Sunni, Hanafi, Syncretic Religions

Abkhazians are a group of people living in the Caucasus region whose presence has been dated back to the Paleolithic period. This entry focuses specifically on the Abkhaz ca. 1880. At this time, Abkhazia was a province of Russia, and had recently experienced many peasant revolts and extensive migrations. The Abkhazian religion was a hybrid of Christian, Islam, and Pagan influences that varied from family to family.



Date Range: 1855 CE - 1890 CE

Region: Abkhazian

Region tags: Asia, Caucasus, Western Asia, Georgia, Turkey, Europe, Eastern Europe, Russia

Physically the Abkhazian region is bounded by the Black Sea along the southwest, the Psou River in the north, the Ingur River in the south, and, along the northeast, the main chain of the Caucasus Mountains. (eHRAF World Cultures)

Status of Participants:

✓ Elite ✓ Religious Specialists ✓ Non-elite (common people, general populace)

Sources

Print sources for understanding this subject:

– Source 1: Divale, W. 2004. Codebook of Variables for the Standard Cross-Cultural Sample. World Cultures: The Journal of Cross-Cultural and Comparative Research.

Online sources for understanding this subject:

– Source 1 URL: <http://ehrafworldcultures.yale.edu/document?id=ri03-001>

– Source 1 Description: Dzhanashvili, M. G. 1894. Abkhaziya i Abkhaztsy. Zapiski Kavkazskago Otdiela Imperstorskago Russkago Geograficheskago Obschestva 16: 1-59. Tiflis. [Memoirs of the Caucasus Section of the Imperial Russian Geographical Society.]

– Source 2 URL: <http://ehrafworldcultures.yale.edu/document?id=ri03-005>

– Source 2 Description: Benet, S. 1974. Abkhazians: The Long Living People of the Caucasus. New York.

Notes: Source 1: English translation from Russian. Translated for the HRAF files by Aza Tugan and Elma

Kasbek in 1964-1967.

– Source 1 URL: <http://ehrafworldcultures.yale.edu/ehrafe/>

– Source 1 Description: eHRAF World Cultures: Abkhazians (RI03)

General Variables

Membership/Group Interactions

Are other religious groups in cultural contact with target religion:

– Yes

Notes: The Abkhaz are in contact with multiple religious groups, including Christian, Islam, and Pagan. The Abkhaz as a societal group are in contact with other societies.



Is there violent conflict (within sample region):

– Yes

Notes: SCCS variable 1649: Frequency of Internal Warfare (resolved rating) code=17 (original code 5); Internal warfare seems to occur almost constantly and at any time of the year. SCCS variable 1654: Pacification, code=2; inferred to be unpacified because warfare frequency is greater than or equal to 3. (Ember and Ember, 1992; retrieved from Divale, 2004)



Is there violent conflict (with groups outside the sample region):

– Yes

Notes: SCCS variable 1650: Frequency of External Warfare (resolved rating) code=17 (original code 5); External warfare seems to occur almost constantly and at any time of the year. SCCS variable 1654: Pacification, code=2; inferred to be unpacified because warfare frequency is greater than or equal to 3. (Ember and Ember, 1992; retrieved from Divale, 2004)

Size and Structure

Number of adherents of religious group within sample region (estimated population, numerical):

– Estimated population, numeric: 60000

Notes: "Demographic changes in the area have been drastic: the population of Abkhazians fell from about 140,000 in the 1860s down to 58,000 in 1886, but since then it has gradually risen" (eHRAF World Cultures, Abkhazian Culture Summary).

Number of adherents of religious group within sample region (% of sample region population, numerical):

– Field doesn't know

Notes: The Abkhazian religious beliefs are a mix of Christian, Islam, and Pagan ideas, and specific identifications vary from one family/community to another.

Architecture, Geography

Is monumental religious architecture present:

– No

Notes: SCCS variable 66: Large or Impressive Structures, code=1 (none). (Murdock and Wilson, 1972, retrieved from Divale, 2004).

Are there different types of religious monumental architecture:

– No

Notes: SCCS variable 66: Large or Impressive Structures, code=1 (none). (Murdock and Wilson, 1972, retrieved from Divale, 2004).

Are there specific sites dedicated to sacred practice or considered sacred:

– Yes

Notes: "Anybs-nykha-dudryupsh is worshiped as the mightiest of the gods. Mt. Dudryupsh is regarded as his abode. Those who dare to climb this mountain are immediately punished with blindness; therefore prayers and sacrifices to this deity are offered at the foot of the mountain" (Dzhanashvili, 1894:66).



Are sacred site oriented to ecological features:

– Yes

Notes: "Anybs-nykha-dudryupsh is worshiped as the mightiest of the gods. Mt. Dudryupsh is regarded as his abode. Those who dare to climb this mountain are immediately punished with blindness; therefore prayers and sacrifices to this deity are offered at the foot of the mountain" (Dzhanashvili, 1894:66).

Beliefs

Burial and Afterlife

Is a spirit-body distinction present:

Answer "no" only if personhood (or consciousness) is extinguished with death of the physical body. Answering yes does not necessarily imply the existence of Cartesian mind/body dualism, merely that some element of personhood (or consciousness) survives the death of the body.

– Yes

Notes: "The Abkhaz believes that human life does not end with earthly existence, but that it continues after death, or, in the words of the Abkhaz, "on the other side." He believes, in addition, that this life beyond the grave continues at the very place where the deceased is buried" (Dzhanashvili, 1894:37).

Belief in afterlife:

– Yes

Notes: "The Abkhaz believes that human life does not end with earthly existence, but that it continues

after death, or, in the words of the Abkhaz, "on the other side." He believes, in addition, that this life beyond the grave continues at the very place where the deceased is buried" (Dzhanashvili, 1894:37).

↳ Is the spatial location of the afterlife specified or described by the religious group:

– Yes

Notes: "The Abkhaz believes that human life does not end with earthly existence, but that it continues after death, or, in the words of the Abkhaz, "on the other side." He believes, in addition, that this life beyond the grave continues at the very place where the deceased is buried" (Dzhanashvili, 1894:37).

↳ Afterlife in vaguely defined horizontal space:

– Yes

Notes: "The Abkhaz believes that human life does not end with earthly existence, but that it continues after death, or, in the words of the Abkhaz, "on the other side." He believes, in addition, that this life beyond the grave continues at the very place where the deceased is buried" (Dzhanashvili, 1894:37).

Are there special treatments for adherents' corpses:

– Yes

Notes: See Dzhanashvili, 1894, section V. Mourning and Burial of the Dead

↳ Interment:

– Yes

Notes: See Dzhanashvili, 1894, section V. Mourning and Burial of the Dead

↳ Secondary burial:

– Yes

Notes: In the event that that an individual is killed by lightning: "The corpse of a persons truck by a thunderbolt is placed in a coffin, put on a tower, and left there until nothing but his bones remain; the coffin is then taken down and buried with the normal burial ceremonies and the celebration of the funeral-banquet established by custom" (Dzhanashvili, 1894:61).

Are formal burials present:

– Yes

Notes: See Dzhanashvili, 1894, section V. Mourning and Burial of the Dead

↳ Other formal burial type:

– Yes [specify]: Family burial-grounds

Notes: "The Abkhaz do not have special burial-grounds. Each family has its own burial-ground. More often, high and mountainous places near a common road serve as burial-grounds" (Dzhanashvili, 1894:33).

Supernatural Beings

Are supernatural beings present:

– Yes

Notes: Supernatural beings include a supreme high god (Antswa), specialized superior beings (e.g. Aitar, the protector of domestic animals; Azhweipshaa, the spirit of the forest; Shashwy, protector of blacksmiths and artisans), as well as the spirits of deceased humans.

↳ A supreme high god is present:

– Yes

Notes: See Dzhanashvili, 1894, page 41.

↳ Other feature(s) of supreme high god:

– Yes [specify]: Control over weather events

Notes: "During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, if a long dry spell occurred, the whole community would arrange a prayer for rain. They would invite the most honorable or the oldest man, who would speak with God to convince Him that the rain should fall on the village" (Benet, 1974:93).

↳ The supreme high god has knowledge of this world:

– Yes

Notes: "God himself never descends to earth, but if he needs to punish someone or to grant someone his grace, he sends out one of his assistants" (Dzhanashvili, 1894:41).

↳ The supreme high god has deliberate causal efficacy in the world:

– Yes

Notes: "This supreme being is believed to be the cause of all kinds of sickness in man" (Dzhanashvili, 1894:57).

↳ Is it permissible to worship supernatural beings other than the high god:

– Yes

Notes: "Besides this merciful god, the Abkhaz, as we have said, have other secondary gods, whose creation was necessitated by the people's needs" (Dzhanashvili, 1894:42).

↳ Previously human spirits are present:

– Yes

Notes: "The Abkhaz believes that human life does not end with earthly existence, but that it continues after death, or, in the words of the Abkhaz, "on the other side." He believes, in addition, that this life beyond the grave continues at the very place where the deceased is buried" (Dzhanashvili, 1894:37).

↳ Human spirits can be seen:

– Yes

Notes: "The holiday which is most widely celebrated in Abkhazia is the thirty-day Moslem fast called Uraza (Ramadan), when people may not eat from the appearance of the sun until sunset, and married couples sleep separately. Out of 655 people interviewed, 287 kept the fast, either personally or with their families. It is believed that during this period, the dead relatives can see and hear their surviving kin, and they also live an earthly life. Food is laid out for the recently deceased" (Benet, 1974:92).

↳ Human spirits have deliberate causal efficacy in the world:

– Yes

Notes: "The souls of the dead, the "outer ones," are often the cause of sickness in man and his cattle. They often become angry, and the outward signs of such anger are frequent yawning, sleepiness, and general exhaustion visited upon the culprit. If the one afflicted does not satisfy the angered "outer ones" with offerings and prayers, an inevitable death awaits him" (Dzhanashvili, 1894:51).

↳ Human spirits can punish:

– Yes

Notes: "The souls of the dead, the "outer ones," are often the cause of sickness in man and his cattle. They often become angry, and the outward signs of such anger are frequent yawning, sleepiness, and general exhaustion visited upon the culprit. If the one afflicted does not satisfy the angered "outer ones" with offerings and prayers, an inevitable death awaits him" (Dzhanashvili, 1894:51).

↳ Human spirits exhibit positive emotion:

– Yes

Notes: "The Abkhaz believes that the more magnificently they (souls of the deceased) are met and treated, the more satisfied and generous they will be and the more co-operation and patronage they will give the living – in the opposite situation, they would only harm the living" (Dzhanashvili, 1894:38).

↳ Human spirits exhibit negative emotion:

– Yes

Notes: "The Abkhaz believes that the more magnificently they (souls of the deceased) are met and treated, the more satisfied and generous they will be and the more co-operation and patronage they will give the living – in the opposite situation, they would only harm the living" (Dzhanashvili, 1894:38).

↳ Human spirits possess hunger:

– Yes

Notes: "On the graves themselves the Abkhaz lay slices of melons, watermelons, cucumbers, etc. All this serves to confirm the belief that beyond the grave the souls of

the dead require food, drink, lodging, etc., just like the living" (Dzhanashvili, 1894:38).

↳ Human spirits communicate with the living:

– Yes

Notes: "The Abkhaz believe firmly that the souls of the deceased leave their graves and visit their living kin. They stand near their houses and whistle; they are placated by the pouring of wine or the throwing out of something. These souls of the dead like to leave their graves, particularly at night; they stand near the road and when they see a traveler they run after him in pursuit" (Dzhanashvili, 1894:39).

↳ In waking, everyday life:

– Yes

Notes: "The Abkhaz believe firmly that the souls of the deceased leave their graves and visit their living kin. They stand near their houses and whistle; they are placated by the pouring of wine or the throwing out of something. These souls of the dead like to leave their graves, particularly at night; they stand near the road and when they see a traveler they run after him in pursuit" (Dzhanashvili, 1894:39).

↳ Only through specialists:

– No

↳ Only through monarch:

– No

↳ Communicate with living through other means:

– Yes [specify]: During Ramadan

Notes: "The holiday which is most widely celebrated in Abkhazia is the thirty-day Moslem fast called Uraza (Ramadan), when people may not eat from the appearance of the sun until sunset, and married couples sleep separately. Out of 655 people interviewed, 287 kept the fast, either personally or with their families. It is believed that during this period, the dead relatives can see and hear their surviving kin, and they also live an earthly life. Food is laid out for the recently deceased" (Benet, 1974:92).

↳ Non-human supernatural beings are present:

– Yes

Notes: "Besides this merciful god, the Abkhaz, as we have said, have other secondary gods, whose creation was necessitated by the people's needs. Every atmospheric phenomenon, every danger threatening a man or his property, every type of toil assuring the existence of man created in the childish imaginations of these people separate, invisible protectors, ruling over all. These deities have no images, since they appear in different forms according to the circumstances; nevertheless, according to the understanding of the Abkhaz, not to be

doubted, for it is felt in all the good and evil that can happen in the life of a person. Every step of a man is under their control and every departure from the true way immediately evokes punishment by them" (Dzhanashvili, 1894:42).

↳ Non-human supernatural beings have knowledge of this world:

– Yes

Notes: "Besides this merciful god, the Abkhaz, as we have said, have other secondary gods, whose creation was necessitated by the people's needs. Every atmospheric phenomenon, every danger threatening a man or his property, every type of toil assuring the existence of man created in the childish imaginations of these people separate, invisible protectors, ruling over all. These deities have no images, since they appear in different forms according to the circumstances; nevertheless, according to the understanding of the Abkhaz, not to be doubted, for it is felt in all the good and evil that can happen in the life of a person. Every step of a man is under their control and every departure from the true way immediately evokes punishment by them" (Dzhanashvili, 1894:42).

↳ Non-human supernatural beings knows your basic character (personal essence):

– Yes

Notes: "...there are the Ashatsa-chaphatsa, the "creator" and "forger" gods. There are either two of them, or many. Under the influence of Christianity, they are presented in the form of angels. "Every soul" is born through Ashatsachaphatsa. They determine the future of the newborn child, his happiness and unhappiness, the length of his life and the hour of his death, and they make an inscription on his forehead (lakhints'ara /see foreign text/) concerning all this. The Abkhaz is certain that these inscriptions on the forehead exist and believes that anyone can confirm it with his own eyes" (Dzhanashvili, 1894:43).

↳ Non-human supernatural beings know what will happen to you, what you will do (future sight):

– Yes

Notes: "...there are the Ashatsa-chaphatsa, the "creator" and "forger" gods. There are either two of them, or many. Under the influence of Christianity, they are presented in the form of angels. "Every soul" is born through Ashatsachaphatsa. They determine the future of the newborn child, his happiness and unhappiness, the length of his life and the hour of his death, and they make an inscription on his forehead (lakhints'ara /see foreign text/) concerning all this. The Abkhaz is certain that these inscriptions on the forehead exist and believes that anyone can confirm it with his own eyes" (Dzhanashvili, 1894:43).

↳ Non-human supernatural beings have deliberate causal efficacy in the world:

– Yes

Notes: "Each deity may independently show, within his sphere of activity, grace or

wrath toward man; for instance, he may send sickness or misfortune on him or his cattle, etc." (Dzhanashvili, 1894:44).

↳ These supernatural beings can reward:

– Yes

Notes: "Each deity may independently show, within his sphere of activity, grace or wrath toward man; for instance, he may send sickness or misfortune on him or his cattle, etc." (Dzhanashvili, 1894:44).

↳ These supernatural beings can punish:

– Yes

Notes: "Each deity may independently show, within his sphere of activity, grace or wrath toward man; for instance, he may send sickness or misfortune on him or his cattle, etc." (Dzhanashvili, 1894:44).

↳ These supernatural beings possess/exhibit some other feature:

– Yes [specify]: Control over atmospheric phenomena

Notes: "Aphi is the god and master of the thunder, lightning, and all atmospheric phenomena in general" (Dzhanashvili, 1894:58).

↳ Does the religious group possess a pantheon of supernatural beings:

– Yes

Notes: (See Dzhanashvili, 1894, section Vi. Religious Beliefs of the Abkhaz)

↳ Organized hierarchically:

– Yes

Notes: High God, followed by secondary gods, then spirits of deceased humans (see Dzhanashvili, 1894:42)

↳ Power of beings is domain specific:

– Yes

Notes: Of the secondary gods, the power of beings is domain specific. (See Dzhanashvili, 1894, section Vi. Religious Beliefs of the Abkhaz).

Supernatural Monitoring

Is supernatural monitoring present:

This refers to surveillance by supernatural beings of humans' behaviour and/or thought particularly as it relates to social norms or potential norm violations.

– Yes

Notes: "God himself never descends to earth, but if he needs to punish someone or to grant someone his grace, he sends out one of his assistants" (Dzhanashvili, 1894:41).

↳ There is supernatural monitoring of prosocial norm adherence in particular:

Prosocial norms are norms that enhance cooperation among members of the group, including obviously "moral" or "ethical" norms, but also extending to norms concerning honouring contracts and oaths, providing hospitality, coming to mutual aid in emergencies, etc.

– Yes

Notes: "Every step of a man is under their [the gods'] control and every departure from the true way immediately evokes punishment by them" (Dzhanashvili, 1894:42).

↳ Supernatural beings care about honouring oaths:

– Yes

Notes: See Dzhanashvili, 1894, page 64

↳ Supernatural beings care about other:

– Yes [specify]: calling a divinity's name falsely

Notes: "According to the understanding of the Abkhaz, the divinity whose name is called falsely immediately punishes the guilty one by those means or tools which are in the field of his specialty. Thus, for instance, one who has called [Page 64] 54 cont, falsely the name of Aphi, who commands the thunderstorms, cannot be punished by means of firearms or side arms, which make up the specialty of Shasha, etc." (Dzhanashvili, 1894:63).

Do supernatural beings mete out punishment:

– Yes

Notes: "The Abkhaz believes that the more magnificently they (souls of the deceased) are met and treated, the more satisfied and generous they will be and the more co-operation and patronage they will give the living – in the opposite situation, they would only harm the living" (Dzhanashvili, 1894:38).

↳ Is the cause or agent of supernatural punishment known:

– Yes

Notes: "The Abkhaz believes that the more magnificently they (souls of the deceased) are met and treated, the more satisfied and generous they will be and the more co-operation and patronage they will give the living – in the opposite situation, they would only harm the living" (Dzhanashvili, 1894:38). "God himself never descends to earth, but if he needs to punish someone or to grant someone his grace, he sends out one of his assistants" (Dzhanashvili, 1894:41).

↳ Done by many supernatural beings:

– Yes

Notes: "The Abkhaz believes that the more magnificently they (souls of the deceased) are met and treated, the more satisfied and generous they will be and the more co-

operation and patronage they will give the living – in the opposite situation, they would only harm the living" (Dzhanashvili, 1894:38).

↳ Is the reason for supernatural punishment known:

– Yes

↳ Done to enforce religious ritual-devotional adherence:

– Yes

Notes: "The Abkhaz believes that the more magnificently they (souls of the deceased) are met and treated, the more satisfied and generous they will be and the more co-operation and patronage they will give the living – in the opposite situation, they would only harm the living" (Dzhanashvili, 1894:38).

↳ Other [specify]

– Yes

Notes: "According to the understanding of the Abkhaz, the divinity whose name is called falsely immediately punishes the guilty one by those means or tools which are in the field of his specialty. Thus, for instance, one who has called [Page 64] 54 cont, falsely the name of Aphi, who commands the thunderstorms, cannot be punished by means of firearms or side arms, which make up the specialty of Shasha, etc." (Dzhanashvili, 1894:63).

↳ Supernatural punishments are meted out in this lifetime:

– Yes

Notes: "The Abkhaz believes that the more magnificently they (souls of the deceased) are met and treated, the more satisfied and generous they will be and the more co-operation and patronage they will give the living – in the opposite situation, they would only harm the living" (Dzhanashvili, 1894:38).

↳ Punishment in this life consists of extreme sensory displeasure:

– Yes

Notes: "Anybs-nykha-dudryupsh is worshiped as the mightiest of the gods. Mt. Dudryupsh is regarded as his abode. Those who dare to climb this mountain are immediately punished with blindness; therefore prayers and sacrifices to this deity are offered at the foot of the mountain" (Dzhanashvili, 1894:66).

↳ Punishment in this life consists of sickness or illness:

– Yes

Notes: "Each deity may independently show, within his sphere of activity, grace or wrath toward man; for instance, he may send sickness or misfortune on him or his cattle, etc." (Dzhanashvili, 1894:44).

Do supernatural beings bestow rewards:

– Yes

Notes: "The Abkhaz believes that the more magnificently they (souls of the deceased) are met and treated, the more satisfied and generous they will be and the more co-operation and patronage they will give the living – in the opposite situation, they would only harm the living" (Dzhanashvili, 1894:38).

↳ Is the cause/purpose of supernatural rewards known:

– Yes

↳ Done only by high god:

– No

Notes: "The Abkhaz believes that the more magnificently they (souls of the deceased) are met and treated, the more satisfied and generous they will be and the more co-operation and patronage they will give the living – in the opposite situation, they would only harm the living" (Dzhanashvili, 1894:38).

↳ Done by many supernatural beings:

– Yes

Notes: "The Abkhaz believes that the more magnificently they (souls of the deceased) are met and treated, the more satisfied and generous they will be and the more co-operation and patronage they will give the living – in the opposite situation, they would only harm the living" (Dzhanashvili, 1894:38).

↳ Done to enforce religious ritual-devotional adherence:

– Yes

Notes: "The Abkhaz believes that the more magnificently they (souls of the deceased) are met and treated, the more satisfied and generous they will be and the more co-operation and patronage they will give the living – in the opposite situation, they would only harm the living" (Dzhanashvili, 1894:38).

↳ Supernatural rewards are bestowed out in this lifetime:

– Yes

Notes: "The Abkhaz believes that the more magnificently they (souls of the deceased) are met and treated, the more satisfied and generous they will be and the more co-operation and patronage they will give the living – in the opposite situation, they would only harm the living" (Dzhanashvili, 1894:38).

Norms and Moral Realism

Are general social norms prescribed by the religious group:

– Yes

Notes: In the case of the Abkhasians, religion is coterminous with society, and consequently, all norms and morals are of religious and social importance. "Shariat, or the Islamic law, is observed by the Moslems and applies almost exclusively to religious ritual. However, some of the family customs bear resemblance to traditions common to Moslems everywhere. The Adats, Abkhasian customary laws, are observed and respected by all. They are self-imposed, unwritten laws dealing with retribution, family regulation, and interpersonal behavior" (Benet, 1974:47).

Is there a conventional vs. moral distinction in the religious group:

– No

Notes: In the case of the Abkhasians, religion is coterminous with society, and consequently, all norms and morals are of religious and social importance. "The Adats, Abkhasian customary laws, are observed and respected by all. They are self-imposed, unwritten laws dealing with retribution, family regulation, and interpersonal behavior. The people are law-abiding, with a great respect for the Adats and the Shariat, which they consider just and workable. The Adats are the most important laws because they touch upon every aspect of life. They show some Islamic influence, but are for the most part pre-Islamic and pre-Christian" (Benet, 1974:47).

Are there centrally important virtues advocated by the religious group:

– Yes

Notes: In the case of the Abkhasians, religion is coterminous with society, and consequently, all norms/morals/virtues are of religious and social importance. See specific virtues and notes below

↳ Generosity / charity:

– Yes

Notes: "Along with his hospitality and generosity, the Abkhaz is also courteous, polite, and respectful, especially to older persons" (Dzhanashvili, 1894:15).

↳ Familial obedience / filial piety:

– Yes

Notes: "The rights of seniority are strictly observed in the Abkhaz family. All the members of the household obey their pater familias (avn aihab). In the family everything is done according to his orders and wishes; only in matters concerning women does the oldest woman in the family (avn eihab aphs) take command. The younger members always act according to the instructions of the older ones, but if a younger member of the family is cleverer or more experienced than one of superior age, then for all practical purposes things are arranged according to his wishes and instructions" (Dzhanashvili, 1894:20).

↳ Other important virtues advocated by the religious group:

– Yes [specify]: Hospitality

Notes: "...hospitality is piously honored and maintained in Abkhazia" (Dzhanashvili, 1894:14).

Practices

Membership Costs and Practices

Does membership in this religious group require fasting:

– No

Notes: While not mandatory, fasting during Ramadan is a common practice observed by most Abkhazians. "The holiday which is most widely celebrated in Abkhazia is the thirty-day Moslem fast called Uraza (Ramadan), when people may not eat from the appearance of the sun until sunset, and married couples sleep separately. Out of 655 people interviewed, 287 kept the fast, either personally or with their families. It is believed that during this period, the dead relatives can see and hear their surviving kin, and they also live an earthly life. Food is laid out for the recently deceased" (Benet, 1974:92).

Does membership in this religious group require forgone food opportunities (taboos on desired foods):

– No

Notes: "The peasants embraced Islam selectively, ignoring some ritual abstinences, such as wine, but observing such holidays as Ramadan and Kurban Bairam, and following Moslem rites of burial and circumcision" (Benet, 1974:91).

Does membership in this religious group require sacrifice of property/valuable items:

– Yes

Notes: Sacrifices consist of food and drink, objects, and animals (See Dzhnanashvili, 1894).



Other:

– Yes [specify]: to the spirits of the dead and to the gods

Notes: see Dzhnanashvili, 1894:44

Does membership in this religious group require participation in small-scale rituals (private, household):

– Yes

Notes: "And in fact the Abkhaz do believe that the dead will enjoy, for example, the piece of melon placed on the grave. Because of this belief, for almost a full year after a death, a special share of each meal is laid on the table for the deceased, and banquets are held in his memory, etc. Besides this, annual funeral-feasts are held on the eve of the paternal Saturday for those recently deceased, and on the paternal Saturday itself funeral-feasts are held for those deceased longer" (Dzhnanashvili, 1894:38).

Does the group employ fictive kinship terminology:

– Yes

Notes: "There are three kinds of permanent ritual kinship institutions in Abkhazia. These are: atalyk—bringing up a child of another family with the intention of establishing kin relations between the members of both families. milk brotherhood—ritually established between adults in order to cement friendships. adoption—occurring when a family has no sons to perpetuate the family line, or because they want more children; adults are adopted to establish kin relations with a powerful group" (Benet,

1974:56).



Fictive kinship terminology widespread:

– Yes

Notes: See Benet, 1974:57.

Society and Institutions

Levels of Social Complexity

The society to which the religious group belongs is best characterized as (please choose one):

– A chiefdom

Notes: "Throughout Abkhasian history, centralized authority was either nonexistent or ineffective. The kinship system was the institution which integrated Abkhasia into a nation. Each kin group took care of its members and acted as an autonomous political unit in its dealing with other kin groups" (Benet, 1974:49). SCCS Variable 835, Political Integration, one level of political integration above the community (Murdock and White, 1969; retrieved from Divale, 2004).

Public Works

Does the religious group in question provide public food storage:

– No

Notes: SCCS Variable 20, Food Storage, code=2, individual households (Murdock and Morrow, 1970; retrieved from Divale, 2004).

Enforcement

Does the religious group in question provide an institutionalized police force:

– No

Notes: "In the past, the Adats and the Shiriat resolved most conflict. Though only elder males were permitted to pass judgment, the village meetings were open to everyone, and the proceedings were comprehensible to all. There was no need for a body of specialists who were required to master a highly specialized language" (Benet, 1974:47). "Enforcement of the laws is left to the elders of the lineage, the extended and the individual family. The more important the crime, the larger the circle of relatives who are affected" (Benet, 1974:48).

Does the religious group in question provide institutionalized judges:

– No

Notes: "In the past, the Adats and the Shiriat resolved most conflict. Though only elder males were permitted to pass judgment, the village meetings were open to everyone, and the proceedings were comprehensible to all. There was no need for a body of specialists who were required to master a

highly specialized language" (Benet, 1974:47).

Does the religious group in question have a formal legal code:

– No

Notes: "The Adats, Abkhasian customary laws, are observed and respected by all. They are self-imposed, unwritten laws dealing with retribution, family regulation, and interpersonal behavior. The people are law-abiding, with a great respect for the Adats and the Shariat, which they consider just and workable. The Adats are the most important laws because they touch upon every aspect of life. They show some Islamic influence, but are for the most part pre-Islamic and pre-Christian" (Benet, 1974:47).

Written Language

Does the religious group in question possess its own distinct written language:

– No

Notes: "...Abkhasia had no written language until after the Revolution..." (Benet, 1974:48).

Is a non-religion-specific written language available to the group's adherents through an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– No

Notes: "...Abkhasia had no written language until after the Revolution..." (Benet, 1974:48).

Is a non-religion-specific written language used by the group's adherents through an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– No

Notes: "At the beginning of the twentieth century, Abkhasia was a typical colonial province of Tzarist Russia. She was poor, underdeveloped, and over 92% illiterate in any language" (Benet, 1974:7).

Food Production

Does the religious group in question provide food for themselves:

– Yes

Notes: "The main sources of food of the Abkhaz are agriculture, cattle-breeding, and to a certain extent, apiculture. In the foothills the Abkhaz often possess as many as 200 and more beehives. Nowadays they sow maize and occasionally wheat. A few years ago, gomi (ghomi) /millet/ was considered the main and most widespread cereal, but now maize has completely supplanted it. Besides this, tobacco, cotton, flax, hemp, and vegetables are sown, but in limited quantity and only for home use" (Dzhanashvili, 1894:18).



Please characterize the forms/level of food production [choose all that apply]:

- Gathering
- Pastoralism

– Large-scale agriculture (e.g., monocropping, organized irrigation systems)

Notes: The Abkhazians are primarily herders with a secondary dependence on agriculture, and a minor dependence on gathering. The following variables were originally published in the Ethnographic Atlas (Murdock, 1962-1971), retrieved from Divale, 2004. Variables 203-207, 232.