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Towards the Kartvelian Substratum in the Abkhazian Language According to the Christian Cult Vocabulary

S u m m a r y

The work analyses the Kartvelian (Georgian-Megrelian) and Greek Christian terms present in the Abkhazian language: a-wax^oama ('church'), a - mkamgaria ('patron deity of a cow'), a - səmgaria // a - skamgaria ('removing spells from a she-buffalo'), a - k-alantar ('a big paraffin candle'), a - çqark^outxia ('Baptism'), k-ərsa ('1. Christ; 2. Christmas; 3. December'), a - k-ərsian ('a Christian'), targ-alar ('Archangel'), mardiani ('blessed'). These terms have entered Abkhazian via the Megrelian dialect of the Colchian language, and this is indicated by their phonemic and semantic peculiarities. The analysis of these terms, most significant for the Christian religion, makes it possible to determine the approximate date of their occurrence in the Abkhazian language; They could not have entered the Abkhazian language before the 10th - 13th centuries and earlier than the 17th - 18th centuries. The chronological analysis of the question poses the problem that Procope Caesarean's (6th century A. D.) information about the converting the Abasgs and Apsils into Christians means the Christianization not of the whole mass of the old Abkhazian population, but only the aristocratic class having the Byzantine orientation (it is a subject of a separate study whether the Abasgs and Apsils have been the ancestors of contemporary Abkhazians). The analysed linguistic material shows that up to the late mediaeval centuries the mass of the ancestors of contemporary Abkhazians had been pagan, and only at the time of the assimilation of the Colchians (Megrelians) and the Svans, who had lived on the territory of modern Abkhazia before their arrival, the Christian religion was accepted superficially by the Abkhazian. This opinion is proved by the fact that the Abkhazian language has not borrowed the Greek Christian terms immediately from the Greek language, they have been loaned as a substratum from the Megrelian dialect of the Colchian language, and, what is most important, these Christian terms have acquired the semantic characteristic to a pagan religion.