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ETHNOLINGUISTIC SURVEY OF THE GEORGIAN LANGUAGE VILLAGES IN IUSUFELI (HISTORICAL TAO) – *KHEVAI* (BICHAKCHILAR)

This research is dedicated to the memory of Mr. Zulkifl Kecheji (Qajrishvili), one of our first hosts in the Khevai (Basilikari) community who tragically died in 2008.

Khevai (a group of villages) in historical Tao is located in the Parkhlitsqali valley. The river Parkhlitsqali originates from Ponto mountains. To these days the population of three villages of the Parkhlitsqali valley still speak Georgian. These villages are Khevai, Kobai and Balkhi, each of which contains some small villages within themselves.

According to the Georgian sources this region was referred to as the Kavkasidzes' family domain.

The present paper discusses Khevai, the present official name Bichakchilar Koy, which is one of the three villages mentioned.

In the Arthvin region of the modern Republic of Turkey not only the Parkhlitsqali valley villages of Iusufeli (historical Tao) but also the far reaching regions of the mixed ethnic settlements and the settlements regarded as ethnic Turkish mainly have Georgian micro-place-names.

The everyday activity pattern of the Khevai population is a classic example of the South-west Georgian cultural life and husbandry. The population have preserved those types of patterns, which were generally characteristic to the South-west Georgia, including agriculture, livestock farming, settlement arrangement and distribution, living abode types and other buildings for agricultural use, tools, catering culture, and more. In fact, these villages of the historical Tao are the live museums of the Georgian ethnographic materials.

Presently Georgian population of Khevai are Suni Moslems but their Georgian identity is absolutely obvious. Like in all the historical South-west Georgia Tao population cherishes the memory of the Saint Queen Tamar of Georgia.