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CHRISTMAS AND NEW YEAR OF GEORGIANS, AND FIRST VISITOR TO FAMILY AT NEW YEAR

Christmas and New Year occupy a special place among other common holidays in Georgia. Christmas is one of the greatest religious holidays for the Georgians. Christian Georgians (a large majority of the country) meet the holiday commemorating the birth of the Saviour with fasting, prayers, confession, the Eucharist and virtuous deeds. People meet this great Christian holiday basically in the same way in different regions of Georgia. Christmas and the New Year holidays enrich each other. The proposed paper deals with the popular customs and certain terms such as:

1. Alilooba;

“Alilooba” – going door-to-door on Christmas eve singing “alilo”, congratulating the hosts and receiving gifts from them.

2. Attributes of the Christmas table;

3. New Year’s Day and a New Year’s table;

4. Chichilaki (stick with whittled pegs hung with Christmas presents (sweets, fruit) for clergy);

5. Mekvle – the first visitor to a family at New Year. Mekvle brings sweets to the family and blesses them with the following words: “I am coming and setting my foot, God bless you, let my foot be an angel’s footprint!”.

In Kartvelian languages the concept of “Mekvle” is attested in various forms: Mekvle, mepekhe/mepekhuri/mperkhavi, maíuchkhuri / Megrelian: “mepekhuri”/, m ishkhob / Svan: ishkh – pekhi (foot)/.

The presented lexemes are to be discussed as two separate groups:

Mekvle, who is connected to making a mark, leaving a mark (trace) and mepekhe, mepekhuri, mperkhavi, maíuchkhuri, mchishkhob, etc. The last group is semantically connected to “foot”. Supposedly, **Mekvle** < **Mekvale** must be a more archaic form than mepekhe. Apparently, **Mekvle** is associated with the times when a year period used to start in Spring (March 1).

We consider that **mepekhe** (me-perkh-e<me-pekh-e), **m-perkh-av-i**, **maíuchkh-ur-i**, **m-hishkh-ob**, etc. forms were created in the consciousness of a Georgian man soon after New Year was moved from Spring to Winter; as for making one’s mark in the ground – Mekvleoba (being first to visit at New Year),

has been transformed as a concept of a kind person's visit to a family (kind person's "foot").

Mekvle still remains as a main form in literary Georgian as well as in the majority of dialects.

During the Russian rule "a snowman" the same as "Ded Moroz", who used to congratulate New Year, has become an established form; recently, it has been substituted with *Santa Claus /Saint Nicholas/*; though the archaic nature of the "Mekvle" concept is also indicated by the fact that in all Georgian regions the family rituals having something in common with Mekvle who brings **New Year luck** are rather connected with the Old New Year that falls on January 14.