

Svan Names in the 13th to 17th centuries as found in church records

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Svaneti is a region on the southern side of the Caucasus Mountains in the modern Republic of Georgia. It was a province in the unified Kingdom of Georgia from the beginning of the 11th century. After the Kingdom dissolved in the 15th century, it was an independent state until absorbed by the Russian Empire. The Svans themselves are an ethnic group distinguished by their own language in the Kartvelian language family. Until modern times it did not have a written form and Georgian, the most widely spoken Kartvelian language and the only one with a historical written form, was used instead for documents.

Surviving church records from the 13th through the 17th centuries were published in Georgian.¹ The list of names included here is from a more recent monograph that refers to the earlier Georgian publication.² The monograph makes specific comparisons between modern names, the names recorded in 19th century Russian ethnographic works, and the names from the medieval church records.

Georgian Names in General

Georgian names consist of a saxeli, a given or first name, and a gvარი, a name to denote what family, clan or tribe a person comes from. The gvარი has served as a surname since the 9th century in Georgia.³ Historically Georgian gvარი often contained suffixes that are regional forms indicating patronymics. However these are family surnames that show lineage not a literal parent-child relationship. Additionally these historical names with regional patronymics are not strictly formed from a saxeli+suffix because of elided consonants. Later 19th and 20th century Russian enforced patronymics were formed without elidation and strictly from the father's name.

List of Gvari

The list is given in alphabetical order with an indication of the centuries in which the name was found. In the original Georgian (see the note at the end) some of the names are given as a saxeli + gvარი combination. However I am using the later monograph which focuses on family names and thus does not record the combinations. Names are recorded with the century in which they appeared in the records. In a few cases there is additional information on alternative spellings. Names listed without a century were identified in inscriptions and not in the church records. Given the context they are of similar age but can not be dated as exactly.

Note that -iani is the historical patronymic suffix used by the Svan. The other historical patronymic suffix found on this list is -dze. This is the suffix associated with the historic region of Kartli which is the lowland region south of Svaneti and the heartland of the unified Kingdom of Georgia in the 11th - 13th centuries.

The names Asianis, Gugava, Gulubianis, Kordzianis, and Shkublianis do not end with a suffix that corresponds to any common regional suffix. Three of them contain -iani- with a final -s. This could be a dative or genitive case of a Svan gvare but it is impossible to say with certainty as -s is also known as a suffix from the related and now extinct Laz language.⁴ Gugava does not fit any pattern.

Gvare (Family Name)	Century		Gvare (Family Name)	Century	
Abdelani	13-14		Khergiani	15	
Asatiani	14-15		Khorguani	13-14	
Asianis	13-14		Khverguani	13-14	
Chedeliani	15		Kirkishliani	14	
Chikovani	13-14		Kordzianis	14	
Dadvani	15		Kurdiani	13-14	
Devdariani	?		Kvanchiani	16-17	
Doghvani	16		Kvardziani	14-15	
Elediani	13-14		Kvitsiani	14	
Gabeldani	13-14	also Gabeldiani	Ladghibiani	?	
Gabliani	13-14		Lominadze	12-13	
Gadrani	13		Loriani	16	
Gelovani	13-17	also Geloani,	Lortkipanidze	14-15	
Geluvani, and Geliani			Magheldiani	13-14	
Ghibiani	?		Maregiani	14-15	
Ghogheliani	13-14		Margiani	15	
Ghvachliani	14		Margvelani	14	
Gigani	13-14		Meipariani	16	
Gogani	13		Mitvliani	14-15	
Goshgoteliani	14	also Goshkoteliani	Muipariani	13	
Guaramiani	13-14		Nakiani	13-14	
Gugava	16		Paikelani	16-17	
Gulediani	13-14		Pakeliani	12	
Gulubiani	13		Parjiani	14	
Gulubianis	13		Ratiani	13-14	
Ioseliani	14		Saghireliani	13-14	
Ioseliani	15		Shargviani	13-14	
Ioseliani	15		Shkublianis	17	
Ivechiani	13-14		Tsakhanelidze	12-13	
Iveldiani	15-16		Tserediani	13-14	
Jabilani	?		Tsipiani	13-14	
Jachvineliani	13-14		Tskhvmiani	13-14	also Tskhuimiani
Jachvineliani	13-14		and Tskhvimiani		
Jamburiani	13		Umpriani	14	
Japariani	15	also Japaridzes	Ushukhiani	13-14	also Ushkhviani
Jokhiani	13		Vedrani	16	
Kaldiani	13-14		Zhorzholiani	14	
Khaptani	13-14				

List of Saxeli

Because of the focus on family names to trace populations the list of saxeli is exactly that, a list of the names given in the original Georgian documents. The only details are that some names have indicated genders. As with English most Georgian names are gendered by habitual use and socialization. There is no linguistic gendering of names. There is no distinction between saxeli and met'saxeli given.

Georgian saxeli are generally distinct from common nouns although in some cases they can be seem to be in the form of a common noun plus a suffix. However the suffixes involved do not always have semantic meaning or consistency.⁵ Given this as well as other issues no general pattern of forming saxeli can be given at this time.

Given names referenced from period sources (female noted only when it is certain)

Abesalom	Igdar	Partzman
Adai	Inai	Piranteli
Adashel	Indoi	Purtukh
Akunela	Ioane	Qveli
Amadai	Ivane	Ruchag
Amuna	Jaura	Rusudan (f)
Anton	Javakhi	Sargis
Aslan	Jiji	Satut (f)
Ataraji	Kakhaberi	Shavla
Azag	Kakubai	Shaman
Basil	Khalina (f)	Sukvai (f)
Basila	Khuergo	Susula
Batsia	Khvashaqi (f)	Taba (f)
Bendani	Kutia (f)	Taibukh
Botso	Kvel	Taibula
Chorman	Lela	Tamtar
Daturar	Mamisa	Tarji
Datvai	Mamkan (f)	Tetrua (f)
Demetre	Mariam (f)	Thathe
Djulaba	Martskhi	Thuma
Dodel	Merab	Tsitsman
Duda	Michael	Tvalai
Dudai (f)	Nana	Tvalmindi (f)
Dzadzu	Nanba	Vakhakhi
Gamrekeli	Nasqida	Vakhtang
Gela	Natai	Varedan
Giorgi	Neke	Veshag
Guangva	Nene	
Guchu	Nonai	
Gvangva	Okropir	

Two additional categories of names that partially (but not completely) overlap the first list are called out. First is a description of canonized Christian names common in Svaneti and Georgia.

Giorgi	Arsen	Davit
Ilarioni	Marine	Zei
Mikel	Egnati	Iakob
Mariam (f)	Gabriel	Anania
Martha (f)	Nikoloz	Grigol
Nino (f)	Demetre	Basil
Ivane	Atanase	
Noe	Makar	

Second is a list of names said to be derived from lowland (non-Svaneti) Georgian including eastern influenced names that I theorize are of Armenian, Persian, Turkic, or Arabic descent.

Mukhlukhai	Shuenuri	Angurag
Nateli (f)	Chabukvela	Arghun
Nagvela	Djokhai	Tariel
Gamrekel	Datuai	Sargis
Gvantsa (f)	Nizhara	Rusudan (f)
Khalina (f)	Shavai	Gurandukht
Ertgulai (f),	Kalkmai (f)	Rati
Sinatle	Lomai	Vakhtang
Rkina	Prangi	Khvashagi
Djavakhi	Tbeli	Beshken
Okropiri	Mtvare (f)	Djahvar
Tvalshavi	Tsetskhilai	Abesalom
Toulai (f)	Tvare	Siagush
Zviad	Dudai (f)	Partsmán
Qursiki	Chkhagu	Shahanshah
Nakvetai	Gudjedji	Taibula
Tvalmindi (f)	Veshag	Burlukhan
Mtsare	Berezhí	Chakatan
Shvidai	Zazi	Atardji
Bichsai	Chargas	Shekhasan
Ledachi	Tutai	Bezhan
Tsotne	Kurtskha	
Malkhina	Tinatini	

Issues

As Georgian is written in a non-latin script there are some difficulties dealing with names. I noticed particularly with the name Davit / Davit but while the issue is worse with that specific name it might occur with others. In modern Georgian script (mkhedruli - used since the 11th century) Davit is დავით. Letter by letter transliteration gives Davit. Google translate gives David. The modern source that I drew from uses transliteration although it is not entirely consistent even when quoting a medieval inscription.

An additional complication is found in cases. Georgian has seven cases and it is not clear if all of the names given are in the same case. As a consonant ending stem Davit is the vocative case and Daviti is the nominative. A vowel ending stem such as Giorgi would be Giorgi in both the vocative and nominative cases. Translation into English, either professional in the case of academic articles presented in both languages or by computer translation, tends not to preserve this distinction.

Note on Future Work

I have found a digital copy of Historical Monuments of Svaneti.⁶ While this is not the original handwritten manuscript it does indicate areas in which the original is missing or unreadable and seems to be a direct copy for purposes of preserving the text without modernization or editing. There is work to be done using this document to look at letter by letter transliteration to help clarify issues that have occurred due to working with a modern Georgian academic paper translated into English. As such this current document is a placeholder until additional analysis can be done.

Note on Intent

It should be noted that Pavle Ingorokva, the scholar who preserved the church records by publishing them in 1941, does not have the best reputation. He was the first proponent of the theory that the modern Abkhazians are not the same as the Abkhazians from late antiquity and the medieval period. This completely invalidated theory has been used by both the Soviet Union and independent Georgia as justification for discrimination against the Abkhazians. Having examined a portion of his publication using computer translation I am satisfied that the document in question is a transcription without editorializing or commentary and is in no way tainted by his theory.

References

- 1 Ivorokva, P. Historical Monuments of Svaneti. Tbilisi; 1941
- 2 Topchishvili, R. Svaneti and its Inhabitants (Family Names and Ethno-historical Studies). Tbilisi; 2015
- 3 Wier, T. Proper Names in Georgian. <https://lingbuzz.net/lingbuzz/007973>
- 4 Wier, p.13
- 5 Wier, p.9
- 6 <https://dspace.nplg.gov.ge/handle/1234/65818>