“Antimarriage” in Ancient Georgian Society

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Abstract. One of the more striking features of the traditional cultures of the northeastern Georgian provinces of Pshavi and Khevsureti is the premarital relationship known as c'ac'loba (Pshavi) or sc'orproba (Khevsureti). This relationship was formed between young women and men from the same community, including between close relatives. It had a strong emotional, even intimate, component, yet it was not to result in either marriage or the birth of a child. Either outcome would have been considered incestuous. I demonstrate that the Svans, who speak a Kartvelian language distantly related to Georgian, preserve a structurally comparable ritual, the designation of which, c'ac:’i:ler, is formed from a root cognate with that of c'ac'loba. On the basis of a comparative analysis of these Svan and Pshav-Khevsurian practices in the context of traditional Georgian beliefs concerning marriage and relationships between “in-groups” and “out-groups,” I propose a reconstruction of the significance of *c’ac’-al- ‘antimarriage’ in prehistoric Kartvelian social thought.

1. Introduction. For over a century, specialists in the study of Indo-European linguistics and history have examined the vocabulary of kinship and alliance of the Indo-European languages for evidence of the familial and social organization of the ancestral speech community (e.g., Benveniste 1969; Friedrich 1966; Bremmer 1976; Szemerényi 1977). The three indigenous language families of the Caucasus have received far less attention in this regard, with comparatively few studies made of the kinship vocabularies of the Northwest, Northeast, or South Caucasian families, save for the purpose of including such terms in etymological dictionaries or inventories of basic lexical items (Šagirov 1977; Klimov 1964; Fähnrich and Bardshweladse 1990, 1995; Xajdakov 1973; Kibrik and Kodzasov 1990). Soselia (1979) provides a useful feature analysis of the core kinship vocabularies of the modern South Caucasian languages and a brief reconstruction of the significance of these terms at the level of the protolanguage. Schulze (1999) and Tuite and Schulze (1998) have examined the history of lexical replacement of terms denoting affines, especially in Northeast Caucasian.

In this article, I discuss two social institutions practiced by linguistically and geographically separate Kartvelian (South Caucasian) communities: the Svans of the northwest highlands of the Republic of Georgia, and the Georgian-speaking Pshavs and Khevsurs, sometimes grouped together under the ancient designation of Pkhovians, of northeast Georgia (see map 1). Although the relationships formed in the context of Pshav c’ac’loba and Khevsur sc’orproba
Map 1. Republic of Georgia, provinces and major cities.
might not be considered kinship by some ethnologists (and the brief pairings formed by Svan ć'ae:ć'i:ler certainly would not be), I argue here that they go back to a relation that contrasted structurally with the institution of marriage in several important respects and that represented a necessary preliminary to it. Charachidzé (1968:101) qualifies the Pkhovian institution of ć'ac'loba/sc'orproba as "antimarriage," a designation that I extend here to the ancestral relationship as well. Although my principal objective is to contribute to our knowledge of the Proto-Kartvelian lexicon and of the social practices of the associated speech community, the data and conclusions presented here may be of interest to comparativists seeking to understand the semantic matrices framing those particular bonds between individuals in various societies that ethnologists classify under the rubric "marriage."

The Kartvelian language family comprises four languages—Georgian, Svan, and the closely related Mingrelian and Laz. Of these, only Georgian has a long history of use as a written language, dating from about the fifth century A.D. The family tree accepted by most scholars, and the one adopted by the authors of the Kartvelian etymological dictionaries (Klimov 1964; Fähnrich and Sardshweladse 1990), is shown in figure 1. According to the consensus view among Kartvelologists, Georgian and Zan form a single branch of the family; the ancestor of Svan is believed to have split off from the protolanguage as early as the beginning of the second millenium B.C.E. (Klimov 1964:34–35; Gamkrelidze and Ivanov 1984:880–81).1

![Figure 1. The Kartvelian (South Caucasian) language family.](image)

Thus, it is highly probable that cognate lexemes found in Georgian and Svan have an antecedent form in the Proto-Kartvelian lexicon. I hope to demonstrate here that the two quite different social practices designated by Pkhovian Georgian ć'ac'loba/sc'orproba and Svanetian ć'ae:ć'i:ler share, in some instances at a
fairly abstract level, a significant number of semantic features, sufficient to reconstruct the outlines of the ancient Kartvelian institution of "antimarriage."

2. Northeast Georgian "antimarriage." Slightly over a century ago, in the Georgian highland province of Pshavi, "an unmarried woman lies with an unmarried man, an outsider (ucxo) with an outsider, often a relative with a relative. There are many cases as well of a married man and a married woman lying together, and everyone knows about this, there is no need to hide the fact" (Važa-Pšavela 1994:157). Thus wrote the poet and gifted amateur ethnographer Važa-Pšavela in 1889. The premarital or extramarital relationship known to the Georgian mountaineers of Pshavi as c'ac'loba and to their neighbors of Khevsureti as sc'orproba is described as a close friendship between a young man and woman, often marked by physical closeness and affection, yet not intended to end in either marriage or childbirth. The partners in this relationship are referred to in the Pshav dialect as c'ac'alni or namosbi 'sworn brother' and nadobi 'sworn sister'; some poems refer to the boy as 3ma-kmara, an expression Charachidzé (1968:96–97) rendered as 'frère-époux' (cf. Važa-Pšavela 1994:70; Mak'alatia 1985:127–28). The Khevsurs employ the designations sc'orperni, literally, 'peers' or 'equals', and 3mobili/dobili 'sworn brother/sworn sister'. As far as can be told, this practice was limited to the two northeastern Georgian highland provinces just named and has been extinct for forty years or more. Since it was first described over a century ago, it has been the subject of much speculation, misunderstanding, and defensiveness. The Russian ethnographer Kovalevsky (1893) saw in c'ac'loba the survival of an ancient Caucasian matriarchy, whereas Mak'alatia (1985:132), whose descriptions of Pshav and Khevsur society date from the 1920s and 1930s, linked it to an ancient practice of "sacred prostitution" (sam'vto rosk'ip'o'ba), which supposedly once accompanied the cult of Adgilis Deda, the 'Place Mother', in the Georgian mountains. The popular Georgian writer Mixeil Javaxišvili included a titillating depiction of physical intimacy between sc'orperni in his novel Tetri saq'elo. To this day, urban Georgians frequently have this scene in mind when discussing the backward folkways of their highland cousins, much to the irritation of the latter and their academic defenders (cf. Q'amarauli 1932:98; K'ik'nakidze 1991). In his monograph on traditional Pkhovian religion, Charachidzé (1968) devoted particular attention to summarizing and analyzing the ethnographic materials on c'ac'loba and sc'orproba then available to him. He understood—correctly, I am convinced—that an accurate understanding of this practice is crucial to the reconstruction of the religious and social ideology of the Georgian mountaineers of the pre-Soviet period. In this same work, Charachidzé (1968) compared c'ac'loba to a superficially similar practice from Svaneti in an attempt to demonstrate that the roots of c'ac'loba are found deep in Kartvelian prehistory. I argue here that Charachidzé's conclusion was correct, but that he chose the wrong practice for comparison. The Svanetian ethnographic dossier does indeed
contain descriptions of a religious practice that shares a common origin with c’ac’loba, but it is not the one Charachidzé had in mind. While, at first glance, the Svanetian ritual of lič‘æ:č‘i or č‘æ:č‘i:ler seems quite different from Pshav c’ac’loba or its Khevsur counterpart, deeper analysis (see section 3) reveals a significant number of shared features.

2.1. C’ac’loba and sc’orproba in Georgian folk poetry. Those who have had the occasion to browse through collections of Pkhovian (Pshav-Khevsur) folk poetry doubtless have been struck by the sharp contrast between the two most prominent genres. On the one hand, there are epic ballads of the martial exploits of real or legendary heroes; on the other, there are short, intense poems of love (requited or unrequited), separation, jealousy, or retribution, sung to the accompaniment of the three-stringed pandur. These latter, as Važa-Pšavela (1994) has observed, are, in large part, inspired by the experience of c’ac’loba. Indeed, I have yet to read a description of c’ac’loba or sc’orproba that does not include at least a few poems such as the following:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Šen, čemo dido imedo,} & \quad \text{You, my great hope,} \\
\text{mzev, mopenilo dilita,} & \quad \text{sun, spreading forth in the morning,} \\
\text{uk ‘ødavebisa c’q’aroo,} & \quad \text{source of immortality,} \\
\text{mos dizax okros milita,} & \quad \text{you flow through a pipe of gold,} \\
\text{šentanamc q’opnīt gamazgo,} & \quad \text{may I be sated at your side,} \\
\text{šentanamc c’ola-3ilita.} & \quad \text{lying and sleeping beside you.}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Šenisamc namglis q’ana mkna,} & \quad \text{May I be a field for your sickle,} \\
\text{ro pxaze šageč’rebodi—} & \quad \text{that I be mown by its blade—} \\
\text{an šeni nandauri mkna,} & \quad \text{or may I become your sworn sister,} \\
\text{guls dardad čageč’rebodi,} & \quad \text{to feel pangs in my heart for you,} \\
\text{anamc, tasi mkna okrosi,} & \quad \text{or may I be a golden cup,} \\
\text{ro yuvinit agevebodi,} & \quad \text{that I be filled with wine for you,} \\
\text{daperili mkna c’itlada,} & \quad \text{may I be tinted in red,} \\
\text{šamsamdi—šagergebodi,} & \quad \text{drink me—I will refresh you,} \\
\text{ana mkna movis p’erangi,} & \quad \text{may I be a silken shirt,} \\
\text{ro gulze dagadnebodi.} & \quad \text{that I might melt on your heart.}
\end{align*}
\]

[Važa-Pšavela 1994:368–69]

Here is another, somewhat longer poem, providing a useful description of how two c’ac’alni might have met a century or so ago:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Dyei sžobav tu γamei?} & \quad \text{Which is better, day or night?} \\
\text{Xalxno, me gk’itxav amasa.} & \quad \text{People, I am asking you.} \\
\text{γame niade k’argia,} & \quad \text{The night of course is very good,} \\
\text{dyei sinatit sžalusa.} & \quad \text{but day will outdo night in brightness.} \\
\text{xmeleze manatobelii} & \quad \text{It brings light to all the land;} \\
\text{mzei maudis tanaca,} & \quad \text{when the sun climbs in the sky,} \\
\text{cxvar-3roxa maepineba,} & \quad \text{the cattle and the sheep spread out,} \\
\text{mayla mtas, dablə č’alasa,} & \quad \text{up in the mountain and down in the meadow,} \\
\text{maasrobis dilis cvar-namsa,} & \quad \text{the sun dries up the morning dew,}
\end{align*}
\]
2.2. A typology of c’ac’loba and sc’orproba. The descriptions of Pkhovian premarital relations given here draw upon Mak’alatia (1985) and Važa-Pšavela (1994) for c’ac’loba and upon Mak’alatia (1935), Q’amarauli (1932), Ociauri (1980), and Baliauri (1991) for sc’orproba. The last-named monograph, compiled by a native Khevsur in the 1920s and 1930s when the practice was still widespread, is an especially valuable resource for understanding how c’ac’loba and
sc’orproba were experienced and perceived a century ago. At that time, the religious system described by Bardavelidze (1957), Charachidzé (1968), and K’ik’nadze (1996) was largely intact. Baliauri’s (1991) description of Khevsur sc’orproba includes a typology based on native categories, and these categories provide the analytical basis for sections 2.2.1–2.2.2.

2.2.1. “Ordinary” sc’orproba. Baliauri (1991:70–120) groups instances of “ordinary” sc’orproba, also known as c’ola-dgoma ‘lying-­standing’, by the genealogical distance between the members of the couple. How this distance is determined is most apparent with regard to near cousins of ego: cousins in ego’s own patrilineage are at distance of zero; cousins in ego’s mother’s patrilineage are at distance of one; cousins in ego’s father’s sister’s husband’s patrilineage and in ego’s mother’s sister’s husband’s patrilineage are at distance of two (see figure 2).

![Genealogical distances of cousins in Khevsureti sc’orproba.](image_url)

In simplest terms, with regard to Khevsurati sc’orproba, two factors seem to be involved in the determination of genealogical distance: (1) whether or not the partner belongs to the same patrilineage as ego, and (2), if the partner belongs to a different patrilineage, how many steps are found in counting through ego’s genealogy from ego to the woman linking ego’s patrilineage to the patrilineage of the partner. For ego’s siblings and ego’s father’s brother’s children, the genealogical distance is zero, since they all belong to ego’s patrilineage (see figure 2). On the other hand, ego’s mother’s brother’s children are in a different patrilineage than ego (that of ego’s father), but this patrilineage is linked to ego’s patrilineage through ego’s mother, who is one step removed from ego in ego’s genealogy—hence, mother’s brother’s children are at a genealogical distance of one (see figure 2). Similarly, the children of ego’s sister, whose patrilineage (that of ego’s sister’s husband) is linked to ego’s patrilineage through ego’s sister, also one step removed from ego, are also at genealogical distance of one.
Additional steps from ego to the linking female relative result in greater genealogical distance. Thus, the genealogical distance between ego and ego’s father’s sister’s children or between ego and ego’s mother’s sister’s children, both involving patrilineages linked through female relatives (in each instance, an ‘aunt’) two steps removed from ego (“father + aunt” and “mother + aunt,” respectively), is two (see figure 2).

Hypothetically, this system can be extended indefinitely, with ‘grandaunts’ (three steps), ‘great aunts’ (four steps), and so on serving as linking women between more-and-more distant patrilineages. But, in practice, Georgian kin tracking becomes increasingly vague and selective—especially where female relatives are concerned—as one considers cousins related through linking women more than three or four steps removed from ego (see, for example, the kin charts in Dragadze [1988:59] and in Xaradze [1939]). Slightly farther out, marriage becomes a possibility; indeed, one may have no idea that the individual in question is anything other than an unrelated “outsider” (ucxo).

2.2.1.1. Kal-mamisaxloba. Sc’orproba with a partner of genealogical distance of zero is called kal-mamisaxloba ‘woman and father’s house’, meaning sc’orproba within the village or within the father’s kin group (guari)—which typically amounts to the same thing, at least in peoples’ conceptions. Within the circle of people considered “close” relatives (axlo natesavebi)—those one refers to ordinarily as “sister” and “brother”—sc’orproba is engaged in spontaneously, with no need for the mediation of a third party nor with much attention paid to the position of the legs or hands when lying together. When young people from the same village or guari gather, they will pair off and sleep side by side on the roof (bani) in summer, or on the upper floor (čerxo, ordinarily the place where the men sleep) in winter (Baliauri 1991:70–72). Among members of the same patrilineage, even where there are seven or more generations of separation, any sexual contact is considered tantamount to incest and dealt with accordingly. It is undoubtedly the fact that sex with one’s “sister” or “brother” would be (or ought to be) unthinkable that underlies the casual nature of sc’orproba within one’s mamisaxloba ‘father’s house’.

2.2.1.2. Disc’ul-dedizmoba. Disc’ul-dedizmoba ‘sister’s child and mother’s brother’s family’ denotes sc’orproba with a member of one’s mother’s patrilineage, that is, with someone at genealogical distance of one (see figure 2). Members of this patrilineage are considered jalian mt’k’ice natesaoba ‘very tight relations’, assuming the role of surrogate parents should a child be orphaned and playing an important function at funerals and in the afterlife (Baliauri 1991:83; Charachidze 1968:60, 93, 262–63). Marriage with someone from one’s dedizmoba is rare and “irregular” (c’esi ar aris) but is at least a possibility beyond three or four generations of separation. In addition to sc’orproba with a member of the household, the host dedizmoba can arrange for
a visiting “nephew” or “niece” to spend the night with a local girl or boy, who, as a member of the village, is tantamount to a family member.

2.2.1.3. Deida-mamidašviloba. At a genealogical distance of two, we find deida-mamidašviloba ‘mother’s sister’s and father’s sister’s children’, denoting sc’orproba with someone of one’s aunt’s husband’s patrilineage or, in general, among children of women who came from the same village.\(^6\) If a boy and girl are linked by closely related mothers, then they can lie together without formality. Should their mothers be more distant relatives, they engage in sc’orproba with greater moridebita da c’esbis dacvit c’vebian ertad ‘reserve and observance of the rules’, especially those rules relating to the positioning of the body and to physical contact. Conversely, marriage between distant cousins is possible, and, indeed, is not rare, although it is explicitly discouraged between those who have once been sc’orperni. This reflects the more general principle ar aris miyebuli c’ola-dgomit col-kmrobae gadasvula ‘it is not acceptable to go from c’ola-dgoma [sc’orproba] to marriage’ (Baliauri 1991:96–98).\(^7\)

2.2.1.4. Sîże-colisdoba and zal-kmreuloba. Beyond a genealogical distance of two, but still within the bounds of “being related,” sîże-colisdoba ‘son-in-law and wife’s sister’ and zal-kmreuloba ‘daughter-in-law and husband’s family’ denote sc’orproba with a member of one’s betrothed’s family or village. Traditionally, northeast Georgian mountaineers were promised in marriage at a very young age—sometimes even while still in the cradle—although marriage and cohabitation did not come until much later, usually around the age of twenty (Schyboll 1994). During this long period of engagement, young Khevsurs would from time to time visit the village of their betrothed and be received by the latter’s family. Arrangements would be made, with the mediation of a young woman serving as elći ‘envoy’, for the visitor to spend the night with a local agemate of the opposite sex, although this person must under no circumstances be the affianced. Since the sc’orperi thus chosen is, genealogically speaking, just as eligible a marriage candidate as the actual betrothed, the relationship of sc’orproba is negotiated and experienced with far more caution, reserve, and vacillation of emotion than in the situations described in sections 2.2.1.1–2.2.1.3, and it should come as no surprise that, on occasion, the young couple thus brought together falls in love. Should the betrothed insist on breaking the engagement in order to remain with his or her sc’orperi, the result is, at a minimum, a great deal of trouble and hurt feelings and, at worst—and not infrequently—violence, suicide, and exile (Baliauri 1991:107–15).

2.2.1.5. Sc’orproba ucxoebtan. Where the partners are considered to be “not related,” the result is sc’orproba ucxoebtan ‘sc’orproba with outsiders’ (< ucxo ‘not related, nor from the same village or shrine community’).\(^8\) Whenever a group of people from different households gathers together—for hay mowing,
harvesting, wool carding, weddings, and even funerals—there is an opportunity for sc'orproba. Should a boy or girl wish to lie with someone who is not a fairly close relative, an “envoy” is asked to ascertain if the other party is receptive to the idea and then to escort the boy or girl to the c'erxo ‘upper floor’ or wherever the two plan to spend the night.

2.2.2. 3mobiloba. Baliauri (1991) distinguishes “ordinary” sc'orproba—more often than not a night spent chatting, accompanied by little more than affectionate cuddling—from 3mobiloba ‘sworn brotherhood’, a genuine and relatively durable love bond between two individuals. An individual will typically have only one 3mobili—the term, meaning ‘sworn brother’, is also applied to the female partner in Khevsur usage—and the relationship will endure up to, and sometimes after, marriage. Traditionally, the 3mobilni married other people, “outsiders,” persons whom they had scarcely known before the day of the wedding, chosen by their families. It is the passion and inevitable heartbreak of 3mobiloba that has given Pshav-Khevsureti some of its finest and most poignant oral literature.

2.3. C'ac'loba and sc'orproba as “antimarriage.” The contrast between sc'orproba and marriage should be evident from Baliauri’s (1991) typology. The relationship of sc'orproba is most unrestrained and spontaneous with those relatives with whom marriage is strictly forbidden (i.e., with those from within what might be called the “incest zone”). With more distant relatives, the negotiation of sc'orproba becomes more and more delicate—“envoys” are used, the couple is more attentive to the signals being given out by their body posture and movements, etc.—and marriage becomes less and less unthinkable and more and more of a possibility. Charachidzé made the same observation with regard to Pshav c'ac'loba:

"Alors que les unions matrimoniales impliquent le respect d'une exogamie absolue, celle des c'ac'al se situe à la limite de l'inceste. Car ceux-ci se choisissent là où précisément le mariage est interdit: au sein du village ou du clan. Le couple c'ac'al peut unir les plus proches parents par le sang (à l'exclusion des frères et des sœurs proprement dits), appartenant à des maisons voisines." [1968:101]

This and other contrasts between the premarital and marital relations of the Pshavs and Khevsurs led Charachidzé to the important observation that c'ac'loba (and sc'orproba, which he does not discuss in much detail) “équivaut rigoureusement à un «anti-mariage», et celà à la fois sur le plan des rapports individuels et des relations sociales” (1968:101). He notes that c'ac'loba and sc'orproba are based on individual choice and equality—either the girl or the boy can take the initiative in choosing a partner and in breaking off the relationship. Both partners present gifts to the other and voice their feelings in
poetry and song. The very term used by the Khevsurs to refer to the practice, *sc'or-p(e)r-oba* 'peer/equal-ness', reflects this aspect of its nature. Marriage, on the contrary, is an asymmetrical institution, contracted between families, often without the consent of the young betrothed—who may, in fact, be too young to talk when his or her future spouse is chosen! As elsewhere in the Caucasus, traditional customary law grants certain privileges to the husband that are not enjoyed by his wife, as, for example, in matters of divorce and inheritance (for useful summaries in English, see Luzbetak [1951] and Grigolia [1939]). In contrast to the love poetry inspired by *c'ac'loba*, the rare mentions of husband-wife relations in Georgian poetry tend to be ironic or sarcastic in nature (cf. Tuite 1993, 1994).

The relationship of *c'ac'loba* or *sc'orproba* must not be consummated in either marriage or childbirth; it must remain *uteslo* 'without seed', that is, without producing offspring. Mountaineers such as Važa-Pšavela (1994), Q'amaramauli (1932), and Baliauri (1991) go to great lengths to emphasize the self-control required of young couples to assure that their deep-felt affection and passion remain "pure," untainted by the depravity (*garg'una*) of premarital sex. Mak'alatia asserts that, when self-control failed, *coitus interruptus* was resorted to by the Khevsurs (1935:170) and Pshavs (1985:129), and Charachidze (1968:99) hypothesizes that the rhythm method was also employed to reduce the risk of pregnancy. All ethnographic accounts agree that the birth of a child to *c'ac'alni* or *sc'orperni* is a social catastrophe (e.g., Baliauri 1991:30–31). The child is regarded as the fruit of incest, and the young couple face expulsion from their families, or worse. Važa-Pšavela (1994:71), echoed by Mak'alatia (1985:129), writes of stoning as the punishment traditionally meted out by the community in such cases. In this respect as well, the trouble begins when, in Charachidzé's words, "le couple <fraternel>... tend à s’assimiler à un couple conjugal" (1968:101). The primary functions of marriage are the begetting of offspring to assure the perpetuation of the family and, especially, of the patrilineage, and to forge a bond outside of the kin group. Premarital relationships are primarily formed within this exogamic group and thus must remain *uteslo*.

There is one other feature of *c'ac'loba* and *sc'orproba* that differentiates them from marital relations and, indeed, to almost all other forms of contact between the sexes. Baliauri cites a Khevsur saying, *sc'orpers mirev-moreva ar ɣrevs*, which, translated literally, reads 'mixing around does not mix a *sc'orper* (Baliauri 1991:63). The root -rev-, which in ordinary Georgian usage means 'mix' or 'mingle', takes on a special connotation in the language of Pkhovian theology. It signifies "to be in contact with a source of pollution," of which the most common are a woman's blood flow (during menstruation or childbirth) and the bodies of the recently deceased (cf. Charachidzé 1968:378–79; Tuite and Bukhrashvili forthcoming). As Baliauri explains, a man's mother, sister, or wife can pollute him (*miɣrivani*), and this can provoke the anger of a shrine (*xat'i*) if the man in question does not purify himself before approaching it. Contact with
his ʒmobili or sc'orperi, by contrast, does not have this effect, since “whoever a
girl or boy loves does not pollute them (ar arevs), and the shrine will not be
angered” (1991). Likewise, a Khevsur informant from Bacaligo interviewed by
Bardavelidze specified that whereas “it was forbidden to pagan shrine
assistants and priests to lay with their wives, it was permitted with their
sc'orperi” (Bardavelidze 1982:90). The Pshavs held a similar belief, for among
them, according to Važa-Pšavela, “c'ac'loba suits the vassal of Lasharis Jvari”
(1994:71). Reference is made here to the principal shrine of Pshavi and to its
resident deity, the apotheosized son of Queen Tamar (to whom an equally im-
portant shrine, situated in a nearby valley, is dedicated). It was common in
earlier times for couples to pair up for c'ac'loba while camping out near the
major Pshav shrines (Očiauri 1991:81, 149, 197, 218). Festivals such as
Atengenoba, which takes place in July and lasts for several days, require at least
some of those attending to spend the night near the shrine, which is typically an
hour or more’s hike from the nearest village. On these occasions, and despite the
proximity of the sanctuary and its touchy, often punitive patron deity, c'ac'loba
was not only tolerated, but positively encouraged. Even transgressions of sexual
propriety were no cause for fear, because, as Važa-Pšavela explains, “Should a
Pshav commit depravity (garq’uniloba caidinos) during the festival of Lasharis
Jvari, it is not considered a sin, since ‘Lasharis Jvari himself loved women’”

This last remark touches upon a critical element of Pkhovian religious and
social thought. Each principal Pshav or Khevsur clan individually, as well as
each province in its entirety, has a patron deity, always imagined as male.9
Affiliated with each clan sanctuary, and situated either nearby or at some
distance, are one or more smaller shrines where prayers and offerings are
presented to the dobilni ‘sworn sisters’ of the patron deity. (The most celebrated
among the dobilni is Samdzimari, worshipped along with her “sworn brother
St. George at Khakhmat’is Jvari in Khevsureti.) This same term is commonly
applied to female c’ac’alin and sc’orperni, and, as Charachidzé (1968:491–700)
argues in detail, the “fraternal” couplings of deities and humans are seen as
paralleling each other.

More importantly, the practice of “antimarriage” in both human and divine
societies symbolically balances, in a sense, the paradox of marriage. As con-
ceived by the Georgian mountaineers of a century ago, the institution of mar-
riage was essential for the perpetuation of the community and, in particular, of
its central institution, the patrilineage. On the other hand, it required the
forming of an alliance with potentially hostile “outsiders” and the installation of
a potentially polluting woman in her husband’s household. Faced with para-
doxes of this sort, involving not only marriage, but also the establishment and
maintenance of trade and relationships of mutual assistance with outsiders—
including North Caucasian communities—Pkhovian social ideology made avail-
able various mechanisms for conjoining the “interior” and the “exterior” or the
“pure” and the “impure” (Tuite 1999, forthcoming; Tuite and Bukhrashvili forthcoming). So-called believer-unbeliever sanctuaries (rJulian-urJuluo salocavebi), where nominally Muslim Chechens and Ingush are invited to pray and offer sacrifices alongside their nominally Christian Georgian neighbors, are one such mechanism; c’ac’loba and sc’orproba, the “antimarriage” of a young woman and her 3ma-kmara ‘brother-spouse’, are another.

3. Svanetian ćac’iliar. According to what appears to be the most widespread indigenous account, sc’orproba originated only a few centuries ago when female shepherds in the mountain pastures took to sleeping at the side of their male friends for protection from marauding North Caucasians (Schyboll 1994). There are, in fact, good reasons for believing that the common ancestor of sc’orproba and c’ac’loba is much older than this, and, indeed, it would appear that an antecedent form of c’ac’loba was known to Early Bronze Age Georgian society, before the separation of the speech community whose descendants now inhabit upper and lower Svaneti. Charachidzé states that the discovery of a Svan correlate to c’ac’loba and sc’orproba could imply that they represent “des survivances d’une institution archaïque, en honneur chez les Géorgiens antérieurement à leur séparation” (1968:109). Charachidzé, and before him Xaradze (1939), believed that the Svanetian ritual known as linturse:l (lit., ‘relationship’) was the sought-after cognate practice. The best-known first-hand description of linturse:l comes from the pen of Besarion Nižaradze (1962), an upper Svan priest contemporary with Važa-Pšavela and, like him, an amateur ethnographer. This bond could be formed between two people of the same sex, but was most commonly pledged between a young woman and man, who are not otherwise related. The young man is invited to the woman’s house and, once there,

kneels before her on one knee and says: “Should I be on your breast or you?,” that is, “Will you be my mother or I your father?” Let us suppose that the woman wishes to be the mother. She opens her shirt, and exposes her right breast. The young man sprinkles salt on it, then approaches and sets his teeth three times on the tip of the breast, saying three times si di, mi gezal (You mother, I son). . . . From this day forward, the woman and man are as blood relatives. They not only spend time together, they often lie together as well [Nižaradze 1962:210–12].

At first glance, linturse:l appears to be quite similar to c’ac’loba—a fictive kinship between two people of opposite sex not married to each other involving a degree of physical intimacy. As it turns out, linturse:l represents little more than a local elaboration of a ritual of artificial adoption, marked by the simulation of suckling at a woman’s, or even a man’s, breast, as found in many Caucasian communities, especially in the west. Gabliani (1927:87–88) describes numerous instances of Svan peasants demanding to be adopted by the local
tsarist administrator, to the point that the latter’s “shirt collar was always undone and his chest exposed” (1927:88). In nineteenth-century Abkhazia, “un adulte peut être reçu dans une autre grand’famille en qualité d’enfant s’il a baisé trois fois le sein de la mère de famille” (Byhan 1936:150). In some North Caucasian communities, such as those of the Circassians and the Karachays, ritual adoption through kissing a woman’s breast could be enacted to avoid blood feuds between families (Colarusso 1994; Volkova and Ormrod 1994). Furthermore, linture: l, like its Abkhaz, Circassian, and Karachay counterparts, is only performed between unrelated people (unlike c’ac’loba and sc’orproba), and what is thereby established is a relation of artificial parenthood, rather than one of siblinghood.

In the same book where she compares c’ac’loba and linture: l, Xaradze (1939:92–95) describes a second Svan ritual that, I argue here, is both in name and in function cognate with the Pshav and Khevsur institution of “antimariage.” The practice is called variously lič’æ:ç’i or ç’æ:ç’i:lær. According to the descriptions known to me, it is performed at weddings and during certain feasts celebrated by lask’ær, which are groups of neighboring households. A lask’ær comprises two or more households from the same section of a village, which unite for purposes of mutual assistance and defense and to share the costs of hosting festivals (Xaradze 1963). Certain feast days are hosted by one household of the lask’ær one year, by another the next year, and so on in rotation. The following is a description of lič’æ:ç’i as performed at the feast of Likures (the name of which appears to contain the root kora ‘household’), celebrated in late January in the upper Svan village of Ushgul:

Next to the hearth they placed a small round Svanetian table (pičk), upon which they set the cooked meat of a sacrificed animal, finely-cut slices of fresh cheese, and two drinking vessels: one called Barblæ tas ‘The cup of St. Barbara’ or nišan ‘sign’ for the man, and an ordinary cup for the woman. These vessels were filled with best-quality strong vodka. The oldest man of the lask’ær left the common banquet table, called to the oldest woman, and together they stood before the small round table. First the man and then the woman took the cups filled with vodka from the table, they toasted the well-being of the lask’ær, drank the vodka, then kissed each other, danced together, and finally returned to the banquet table. Two-by-two, man and woman, all members of the lask’ær performed the ličæ:çi ritual, in decreasing order of age. [Bardavelidze 1941:30–31]

There is evidence of the ritual being performed at Krisdes (Christmas) at K’ala and Ushgul, in honor of the female deity Lamaria (St. Mary), and during the late-winter feast of Limp’ær’iel, the Torch-Feast, the equivalent of Georgian Lamp’roba, which falls on the Sunday after Likures, in late January (Bardavelidze 1939:54–56, 1941:30–33, 76, 1957:72–73).11

Xaradze’s (1939) description of ç’æ:ç’i:lær in the context of a Svanetian wedding is only slightly different. It occurs during that phase of the wedding
known as liq’ie:l, which marks the definitive transfer of the bride to her husband’s home, and which culminates with the bride’s circumambulation of her father-in-law’s hearth three times—a ritual that is also part of Pshav wedding ceremonies (Grigolia 1939:73). The č’ae:č’i:lær ritual is performed by the front door of the groom’s house:

During the meal (lencil), they set cushions by the entry doors of the house, before which they set vodka. Two by two the women and men go to the cushions, kneel down, and drink the vodka; the host brings them sliced boiled eggs on a plate and sliced cheese, and he feeds them one after the other. The woman and man drink the vodka with folded hands, after which they kiss each other. This ritual is called č’ae:č’i:lær. The oldest people begin the č’ae:č’i:lær followed by the younger ones, finally even the children kneel down, girls and boys, but they do not give them vodka to drink. The man chooses which woman to kneel with. [Xaradze 1939:94]

Granted, the resemblance between these rituals and the premarital relationships of the Pshavs and Khevsurs is not immediately evident, and it is doubtless this fact, as well as the rather undramatic and nonce character of the č’ae:č’i:lær pairing, that led to its being overlooked by Xaradze and Charachidzé. Nevertheless, comparison of these institutions yields five important common features.

First, both Pshav and Khevsur “antimarriage” and Svanetian č’ae:č’i:lær involve the pairing of men and women who are already in some way “related”—in the former, by membership in patrilineages, and in the latter, by membership in households composing a lask’ær.

Second, both institutions involve a syntagmatic contrast with marriage. In Pshavi, c’ac’loba precedes marriage in the life course of an individual; in Svaneti, the č’ae:č’i:lær ritual precedes the final rite symbolizing the transfer of the bride to her husband’s household.

Third, both involve the use of vodka: the girl brings a bottle of vodka when she meets her c’ac’ali or sc’órperi; vodka is drunk after the toast during č’ae:č’i:lær. The vodka drunk by Caucasian mountaineers is a home-brewed product, destined primarily for domestic consumption. In Pshav-Khevsureti it thus enters into a contrast with beer, which is brewed by personnel of the shrine before major feast-days for consumption on those occasions. (Wine, which was traditionally imported from the shrine’s vineyards in eastern Georgia, had essentially the same ritual uses as beer.) The two alcoholic beverages are employed contrastively to label the two principal stages of the Khevsur wedding. The first stage, known as araq’it korc’ili ‘vodka wedding’ or gzat aqsna ‘opening of the path’, marks the fiancée’s first stay at her betrothed’s household, for one night only (Baliauri 1991:124, 184). The wedding proper, also known as ludit korc’ili ‘beer wedding’, celebrates the bride’s transfer to the groom’s home, in which she is accompanied by a procession of male and female escorts known as
maq’rebi. The beer served at the ceremony is garnished with dollops of chilled refined butter (erbo) and is called saq’e(e)no, the same term used by the Pshavs to refer to the wine or beer served in a large dish at the summer festival of Atengenoba (Ociauri 1980:118).

Fourth, the relationships are temporary, that of č’æ:č’i:lær lasting only the duration of the ceremony.

Fifth, just as c’ac’loba and sc’orproba were associated with female deities such as Samdzimari and Tamar (the Pshav goddess, not the thirteenth-century Georgian queen), the Svanetian lask’ær feasts during which č’æ:č’i:lær is performed invoke the deities Lamaria and Barbol, who, in all likelihood, stem from the same pre-Christian goddess. The table holding the cups of vodka and morsels of food is placed before the hearth, the site where on other occasions the women of the household pray to Lamaria. Charachidzé (1987:100–105) sees in Lamaria a Vesta-like hearth goddess borrowed from an Indo-European-speaking source, almost certainly the Alanic ancestors of the Ossetes. In my view, Lamaria is a composite character. While some of her traits are indeed Vestal, in other important respects she resembles her distant Khosvan cousin Samdzimari, for whom the hearth is one end point of a mythic trajectory from the remote exterior to the domestic interior and back again (Tuite forthcoming). The marital relationship, by contrast, begins with the circumambulation of the hearth chain by the bride. In some communities, she does this twice, once in her father’s home, to take leave of her patrilineage of origin, and then in her groom’s home, to symbolize her integration into the latter’s household. The hearth chain, unlike the hearth, has strong symbolic associations with the integrity and continuity of patrilinages (Charachidzé 1986:125–30, 198), and its patron deity (where there is one) is male, as in the case of the Ossetic god Safa.12

The postulation of a common antecedent for c’ac’loba and č’æ:č’i:lær is rather more straightforward at the phonological level than at the semantic. Georgian c’ac’-al- and Svan č’æ:č’-i-l- appear to go back to a Proto-Kartvelian root *č’ac’-, or perhaps *č’a:č’-, if one reconstructs a phonological distinction of vowel length in Proto-Kartvelian, as Gamq’relidze and Mač’avariani (1965) have done.13 The regular correspondance of the Georgian series s, c, c’ to Svan and Zan š, č, č’ has been explained by the postulation of a third Proto-Kartvelian sibilant series, variously written *š’, *č’, *c’ or *š, *č, *č’ (Gamq’relidze and Mač’avariani 1965).14 In Georgian, the daughter form of *č’ac’- has undergone addition of the suffix –al (which appears in a number of nouns derived from verb or nominal stems) and the abstract-noun formant –ob-a to give c’ac’al-, c’ac’loba. Svan č’æ:č’i:lær appears to be the plural of a derived noun, possibly a diminutive,15 whereas li-č’æ:č’-i is a deverbal noun known as a masdar, somewhat like an infinitive (cf. li-šxb-i ‘to sew’) (Topuria 1967:211, 230).

4. Conclusion: the evolution of Kartvelian “antimariage.” The comparison of c’ac’loba with a Svanetian ritual sharing several features, and
bearing an etymologically related name, supports Charachidzé's hypothesis that a type of “antimarriage” was known to the prehistoric Georgians. An examination of the features shared by c'ac'loba and c'ar'ci:lar, set in opposition to the principal characteristics of marriage as experienced by the mountaineers of the central Caucasus a century ago, and summarized in table 1, is a first step toward reconstructing the semantics of ancient Kartvelian “antimarriage.”

Table 1. Comparison of Pkhovian and Svan Marriage and “Antimarriage”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>MARRIAGE</strong></th>
<th><strong>“ANTIMARRIAGE”</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>perpetuation of the patrilineage</td>
<td>infertile, “without seed”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>male deity, hearth chain</td>
<td>female deity, hearth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>durable</td>
<td>temporary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>asymmetric</td>
<td>egalitarian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>creates new alliance</td>
<td>reinforces bonds within the group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>partner from outside of the group</td>
<td>partner from within the group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>risk of “pollution”</td>
<td>no risk of “pollution”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>taboos, restrictions; silence</td>
<td>tender, informal; song and poetry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>beer</td>
<td>vodka</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This is of course a skeletal description; we may never know much about the flesh that covered it. Is the short-lived bond established by the Svan ritual closer in nature to its distant antecedent, or is the emotionally rich and often tragic premarital relationship celebrated in Pkhovian poetry? Did early Svan religion once have paired male and female deities whose relationship paralleled that of human “antimarriage”? There is some evidence that Lamaria-Barbol might hark back to a dobili goddess much like the Khevsur Samdzimari (Tuite 1996), but much work remains to be done. Future research might also reveal useful parallels or contrasts between Kartvelian “antimarriage” and real or imagined incestuous relations in other cultures—relations that contrast with exogamous marriage in a symbolic field responding to what is felt to be the paradoxical dependency of the continuity of the local group on the mediation of outsiders (Moore 1964; Vernant 1996). What does follow from the etymology proposed here, and the accompanying paleosociological analysis, is the ancientness of certain binary oppositions in Kartvelian social ideology (male-female, inside-outside, and “pure”-“impure”) and of conjunctive mechanisms in the symbolic system that seek not so much to subordinate or quash one in favor of the other, as to bring them together to assure the survival of the community.

Notes

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especially to John Colarusso and Wolfgang Schulze for their attentive reading of the manuscript. I am particularly indebted to my Georgian hosts in Pshavi, Khevsureti, and Svaneti for their kindness, generosity, and willingness to talk about the more recondite aspects of their traditional belief systems with an obtuse outsider. Fieldwork in Georgia, during the summers of 1995–97 and 1999, was supported by grants from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, and the Fonds pour la Formation de Chercheurs et l’Aide à la Recherche du Québec.

Abbreviations. The following abbreviations are used: B = brother; F = father; M = mother; Z = sister.

1. Although I have little confidence in the glottochronological method employed by Klimov (1964) to arrive at his dating, the positioning of the split in what would correspond to the Transcaucasian Middle Bronze Age is plausible for other reasons. Svaneti does not appear to have been inhabited before the Bronze Age, at which time there appears evidence of settlement and of active exploitation of local sources of arsenic-rich copper. Toward the middle of the third millennium B.C.E., according to the archeological record, Transcaucasia is witness to sudden and thorough-going sociocultural change. Many Early Bronze settlements are abandoned. Ceramic and architectural styles abruptly change: the distinctive Kuro-Arakses black pottery and roundish houses with a central hearth are conspicuously rare in the Middle Bronze Age, while kurgans, containing artifacts of a sort usually associated with early Indo-European populations, become more numerous in Transcaucasia (Dăparidze 1991; Gej 1996). It was during this period of extensive change, I believe, that contact between Svaneti and the rest of Georgia was interrupted to a degree sufficient to allow the Proto-Svan and Proto-Georgian-Zan dialects to drift apart. By the time that the Svanetian copper mines were reintegrated into regional commercial networks later in the Middle Bronze Age (Kušnareva and Rysin 1996), Svan may have already become a distinct language.

2. During my visits to Pshavi and Khevsureti in the summers of 1995–97 and 1999, I occasionally inquired about c'ac'loba and s'orproba. Those I asked situated the decline of these practices in the decades leading up to World War II, a period marked by significant social and infrastructural change in the Georgian highlands, including the construction of roads, the opening of elementary schools and medical clinics, and the overall increase of contact with the lowlands. But a handful of Khevsurs stated that it was the events of the early 1950s that sounded the death knell of s'orproba and several other practices retained from the pre-Soviet religious system. At that time, the entire population of Khevsureti, save for that of the southernmost villages, was removed—by force if necessary—to the near-desert districts of southeastern Georgia. The Soviet Georgian government reversed its decision some twenty years later, but by then much of traditional Khevsur culture had been irreversibly changed.

3. The Daghstani peoples, by contrast, would appear to be better equipped to keep track of these more distant relatives—if one judges on the basis of their kinship terminology, e.g., Archi šekr-tu-[r] 'first cousin' (suffix -r for 'female'); i-šekr-tu-[r] 'second cousin'; ei-šekr-tu-[r] 'third cousin' (četveryjurodnaja sestra) (Kibrik et al. 1977; cf. Kibrik and Kodzasov 1990:55–56). One wonders if the distinction between Northeast Caucasian “endogamy” (or “cousin marriage,” as some Soviet ethnographers have described it) and South and Northwest Caucasian “exogamy” might not be more a matter of ideology, rather than practice. A Daghstani might marry a third or fourth cousin by endogamic preference; a Georgian might marry a comparably distant relative thanks to a “structured forgetfulness” (Lanoue 1999), which permits the potential spouse to be classified as an “outsider.” Genealogical memory may undergo “flattening” as well as pruning in the course of time. During a visit to the Khevsur village of Datvisi, Bardavelidze (1982:25–26) recorded the genealogies of the founders of several named kin groups. A generation later, she revisited Datvisi and asked the same questions. Tilila,
Tixolča, and Idia, the eponymous founders of the principal patrilineages still represented in the village (this was after the mass deportations of the 1950s) were recalled by her informant as three brothers, whereas, in the earlier genealogy, these individuals belonged to three distinct generations (Tilila was said to be the FB of Tixolča and the FFB of Idia).

4. Note that the kin term biža, which in standard modern Georgian refers to ‘uncle’ (FB, MB), in earlier usage denoted FB specifically or, more loosely, any man of father’s generation belonging to ego’s guari (Orbeliani 1965–66, 1:103; Goginashvili 1988).

5. Baliauri (1991:79) relates the tragic story of two Khevsur sc’orperni separated by six or seven generations (mamani, lit., ’fathers’) who begot a child. The girl killed the newborn child, a boy, and was expelled by her family; the child’s father was pursued and eventually killed by his own “brothers.” As noted by Xaradze (1949, cited by Mamulia 1979:34–35), marriage within a Khevsur guari can be arranged if the couple concerned is not deemed to be too closely related and if the guari itself has been formally split. This requires a public declaration, sometimes accompanied by the placing of a stone marker (saman) in the shrine precincts, that mama-jmoba gaq’rilia the father-brotherhood has been split’ and that the two new lineages are no longer bound by obligations of mutual aid, shared responsibility in blood feuds, etc.

6. Agretev sínisben erti soplis disc ’ulebi, miuxedavad guarebisa ‘Likewise children of women from the same village regard themselves as sínis, regardless of their patrilineage’. The verb in this sentence is based on the root sínis—a kin term apparently of Vainakh (Chechen-Ingush) origin. Its core meaning is ‘MZ’s child’—conceived as the most “distant” of the cousin relations —although in some areas its sense has expanded to include ‘FB’s child’ (called mamit sínis) by the Khevsurs, or ‘FZ’s child’ (Xaradze 1940; Džavaxadze 1971, 1986; Ghlont’i 1974, 2:249).

7. Likewise, in Pshavi, according to Važa-Pšavela, c’ac’als ar šeuq’lian tavisi c’ac’ali colad šeirtos, es didi dasa njhrxi sakme ikneba ‘it is not possible for a c’ac’ali to take his c’ac’ali as a wife; this would be strongly disapproved of’ (1994:369).

8. The usage of ucxo to designate those not classified as kin is also attested in medieval Georgian documents (Mamulia 1979:40–41).

9. Many of these deities bear the names of Christian saints, although they may have little else in common with their namesakes. One of the chief Khevsur shrines, in the village Gudani, is named yatiambeans, literally ‘the one who gave birth to God’, a title of the Blessed Virgin in the language of Georgian Orthodoxy (= Greek Theotokos). Curiously, but in a manner consistent with the principle described here, the local worshippers imagine their patron deity as male and as having auxiliary dobilni ‘sworn sisters’ (Bardavelidze 1982:18–20).

10. As noted by certain anthropologists (e.g., Keesing 1982; Maranda and Maranda 1970) studying the Melanesian societies of the Solomon Islands, where symbolic systems similar in certain respects to those of the northeast Georgians are found, the labeling of women and their menstrual or childbirth blood as “impure” or “polluting” is, at best, a gross simplification of indigenous conceptions, and, at worst, completely misleading.

11. According to five natives of upper Svaneti (four from Mest’ia and one from Mulakh) whom I asked to describe this ritual, čeq:č’lær is still performed at the late-winter feast of Likuresš. The older informants provided descriptions roughly similar to those of Bardavelidze. Two of the younger informants, more or less in their forties, noted that two men may drink the čeq:č’lær toast together, as a token of faithfulness or reconciliation. This is clearly an innovation and, in all probability, a recent one at that.

12. If the Svanetian goddess Lamaria reflects Indo-European influence on an indigenous Caucasian religious system, Safa is almost certainly an example of the reverse. His name, evidently borrowed through an East Circassian dialect (Proto-Northwest-Caucasian *šas’o > East Circassian *šafa), and many of his attributes are

13. Fähnrich (1985) has, in fact, reconstructed such a root, *č'ač'-, on the basis of a comparison of Georgian c'ac'-al- (‘Freundin’, Geliebte[r]) and Svan č'ač'-ul- ‘doll’ (‘Puppe’). The latter word may indeed represent a distinct semantic specialization of the Svan č'ač'~ root under discussion here, although in view of the sizeable number of Svan expressive lexemes with two č's linked to children (e.g., č'ač'orix ‘children speak sweetly’, č'ič' ‘child’s fart, č'uč' ‘penis, in children’s speech’ (Lip’art’eliani 1994:333–38), simple coincidence cannot be ruled out.

14. Schmidt (1962), who regards the Svan and Zan reflexes of this series as essentially unchanged since the protolanguage, would presumably reconstruct *č'a č'.

15. Specifically, č'ač'i:lær ‘the little č'ač'-es’. The formant -i:l- might also be related to the -al- in c'ac'al-, though this presents some phonological, as well as semantic, difficulty.

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