

## On the Etymology of the Surname "Antia"

(Based on Material from Chkaduashi Village)

**Abstract:** This publication looks into the historical origins of the surname "Antia", commonly found in Samegrelo, and seeks to trace the evolution of its etymology over time. Documented sources, scientific research, and folklore surrounding the origins of this surname, offer various interpretations. An early mention of the surname can be dated back to a 1682 document, which references an individual named Pharemuz Antia. The scholarly community remains divided in their opinions regarding the name and surname "Antia": Antia being a name derived from the Lives of the Saints, connections with the pagan god Antar, an oral history account by a local story teller suggesting that the Antadze family, from which the surname originated, may have resettled from Guria to Samegrelo.

**Key words:** Antia, Antadze, Antidze, Antari, Orkine

The history of Chkaduashi village and the names of its individual populated sites closely intertwine with local surnames. The primary objective of this scholarly work is to acquaint the reader with the etymology of the Antia surname, commonly found in the village. "As a Georgian, one has always been interested in his/her own surname's history, as well as the historical origins of surnames borne by others. Prior to entering into matrimonial unions, prospective spouses sought to look into the lineage entailed by the name of their future life partner. The surname served important social functions and identified a larger group of consanguineous individuals (Tophchishvili, 2021; 3).

The study of names and surnames has followed a distinct historical trajectory throughout the centuries. Historical and ecclesiastical records, housing census data, the Monuments of the Georgian Law, as well as oral narratives passed down through generations about the origins of surnames and household deities (*jinjish khati*), have served as pivotal sources for investigating the etymology of surnames. “The first proper name, known as an anthroponym, dates back to the 6th day after the creation of the world. The Lord, who was not only the creator of the first man but also the originator of the first proper name, '*named the man Adam*' (Goderdzhishvili, 2021; 11)”.

Multiple interpretations exist regarding the origin of the 'Antia' surname. The name 'Antia' can be found in the Lives of the Saints, which features an alphabetical list of saints according to the Orthodox Church. Among these saints, there is mention of St. Antia, who is identified as a Roman aristocrat. “The Holy Martyrs: Saint Eleutherius, his mother Antia, and Caribus the Eparch. Eleutherius's mother, a noble Roman woman of wealth. She received the sacrament of baptism by the Apostle Paul, and he also bestowed the sacred rite upon her beloved son. And she raised her son into a pious man. At the age of fifteen, the Pope Anacletus (76-88) ordained Eleutherius as a deacon. Three years later, he was further elevated to the office of priesthood. At the age of twenty, Eleutherius was consecrated as the Bishop of Illyricum, an occurrence of rare significance in the history of the Church. The young pastor guided his flock with profound wisdom and led many pagans embrace the Christian faith. The divine grace of God rested upon the saint who willingly surrendered his life into the hands of the Almighty, therefore his human frailties and imperfections were transmuted by the grace of the Holy Spirit. When the impious Emperor Hadrian (117-138) initiated the persecution of Christians, Bishop Eleutherius found himself in captivity too. Protected by the divine power and unwavering in his faith, Eleutherius fearlessly proclaimed his allegiance to Christ, exposed the malevolence of the King and offered heartfelt prayers for the conversion of his executioners. Observing the futility of torturing Eleutherius, (*Hadrian*) ordered the saint to be

bound to two fierce bulls, but he failed once again; the Lord's angel shattered the bonds and the saint was delivered from the hands of his tormentors and taken to the summit of a nearby hill. From that moment, the blessed Eleutherius lived among the creatures of the earth. When Hadrian became aware of this occurrence, he dispatched riders to capture this chosen one. St. Eleutherius willingly surrendered himself into the hands of those warriors. Upon the impious King's command, St. Eleutherius was martyred through beheading. St. Antia praised the Almighty for granting her son the honor of martyrdom for the sake of Christ. Afterwards, Antia was beheaded too. Caribus the Eparch came to embrace the Christian faith and he too faced execution. True believers gave the chosen souls a fitting burial” (Life of the Saints 2003). As the material illustrates, the name 'Antia' has evolved into an eponym, and in contemporary times, 'Antia' has become a commonly found surname.

The earliest recorded instance of 'Antia' as a surname dates back to the 1682 Bichvinta note authored by Catholicos of Abkhazia, Davit Nemsadze. Pharemuz Antia is mentioned as the possessor of a serf named Ejibia Kikolaia: “Blessed be a blessing, Catholicos of the North and Abkhazia, (we) donated the humble and modest gift to the Bichvinta Holy Mother, esteemed as heavenly and praised by the Cherubims, which is Ejibia Kikolaia and his wife, previously under the care of Pharemuz Antia... This serf pled for our assistance, and (as) he was not the serf of Antia, nor of the Dadiani (*family*), we took him under our protection and offered him to the Holy Mother's church” (Khets 77). According to this document, Pharemuz Antia was a prospective member of the gentry, and he was entrusted with the serf, named Ejibia.

It is worth noting that scholars have varying perspectives concerning the name 'Antia.' I. Khiphshidze posits that 'Antari is “*jhini ghoroneti*” - signifying 'high god”, and his interpretation leads to the derivation of surnames such as 'Antia,' 'Antelava,' and 'Kantaria' (Khiphshidze, 1915; 132). I. Javakhishvili concludes that 'Anta' is a contracted form of the

ancient pagan deity of the Georgians, 'Antari,' which subsequently evolved into a proper name (Javakhishvili, 1919; 115). A. Tughushi offers an etymological analysis of 'Antari' as follows: “'Antari' likely denoted great or prime and represented the deity of the skies (Tughushi, 1991: 158). Divergent opinions regarding the origin of the 'Antia' surname have been articulated by I. Maisuradze: “ 'Ants' were tribes with close ethnic ties to Georgians, residing along the eastern coast of the Black Sea. This connection is evident in contemporary Georgian surnames such as 'Antia,' 'Antadze,' 'Antidze,' 'Antelava,' and others (Maisuradze 1987). ‘Anti’ meant a red man in the Guria region, wrote Z. Chumburidze and he associated the origin of surnames like 'Antadze' and 'Antia' with the color-based etymology (Chumburudze 1993: 65). This view was further supported by P. Tskhadaia (Tskhadaia 2000). Additionally, alongside scholarly perspectives, an oral account from a local storyteller, M. Antia, in the village of Chkaduashi within the Zugdidi municipality, recounts the presence of a local deity (*odabade*) and a household god (*jinjish khati*) in the Guria region, and the fact of the settling of the Antadze (Antidze) in the aforementioned village.

“The Antadzes held a prominent position in Guria, being known as both gentry and renowned hunters. A local individual of humble origin, after unintentionally killing a hunting dog, was compelled to vacate his residence and relocate his family to a more secure and uninhabited forested area within Chkaduahsi village, a well-known hunting ground. This area was frequented by the Dadiani family, who would often invite their guests for hunting. A visit by the Duke of Abkhazia to the Dadia of Samegrelo (Dadiani) in Kortskheli village did not go without a hunting spree <sup>1</sup>. They ventured to hunting locations renowned for the herds of stags and does that roamed the area. The Dadia of Kortskheli (Dadiani) knew the landscape, including a spring frequented by deer (which has endured through the ages). The Duke of Abkhazia did not shoot the animals at the water spring and instead directed his gaze to an

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<sup>1</sup> Original style. Obviously, one of the Dadiani princes is referred to. This narrative lends support to the notion that Kortskheli village may have housed the Chijishkari state residence.

elevated spot. Dadia of Korskheili was surprised and asked: 'Dear Duke, what are you waiting for?' 'Over there, a light is burning (*antia*, in Georgian)', the Duke responded. Thus the beacon of fire revealed the fugitive's location. Upon being summoned, the Antadze from Guria was cautious to approach and requested the Prince to swear an oath for his safety. The Dadia solemnly swore by the heavens above and the earth beneath his feet, declaring, 'I swear, there shall be no harm to you by my command.' Antadze swore likewise, bringing his wife and child along; the child was secured to a wooden board as they stood before the Princes. Antadze shared the reasons behind his forced departure from his homeland with the Prince. After hearing the story, the Dadia of Korskheili made a solemn pledge to Antadze. He assured that Antadze's descendants would never be subjected to serfdom under the Prince and would enjoy freedom instead. He escorted Antadze from his refuge in Chkaduashi. he allocated a household plot to Antadze and resettled him within the village of Korskheili, in the area known as 'Orkine', also bearing the name 'Naantu' (or 'Naanturi'), as referred to by the local inhabitants."

It is indeed a fact that the Antia family strongly adhere to this particular account of the origin of their surname; according to this narrative, the particle 'Anta-' underwent transformation, with the Kolkhetian '-ia' suffix gradually supplanting it, resulting in the modern 'Antia' surname.

Obviously, the gentry bearing the 'Antadze' surname had initially migrated from Guria to Samegrelo. "Antadze' surnames are categorized among the foremost tier of the landed gentry, (Chumburidze 1993: 30) however, the specific Antadze who was granted the status of gentry by the Prince resided as a peasant in Samegrelo, particularly in Chkaduashi".

In the feudal hierarchy in Samegrelo, the predominant figure was the Prince. Beneath the Prince, there were hereditary princes, peers, and landlords. One such member of the Dadiani

family, Prince Giori Otias-dze Dadiani (1728-1799), is noted to have held the status of a landlord in Chkaduashi from the second half of the 17th century. Descendants of the prince resided in the same locality: Nikoloz (Great Niko), Giorgi, Besarion, Petre and Pavle Dadiani. Historical records of the 19th century, including birth certificates and the 1860 household census data of Samegrelo, reveal the presence of individuals with the Antia surname among the peasants owned by the hereditary princes. At that time, Chkaduashi village was home to 22 households. Notably, Great Niko Dadiani, who held the title of Lord Chief Justice of the Samegrelo Principality, possessed 8 households under the 'Antia' surname. Prince Petre Dadiani owned 5 such households, Prince Giorgi Dadiani had 7, and Prince Pavle Dadiani possessed 2 (Tskhadaia, 2000). It appears that the Dadiani family had direct ownership of total 22 registered 'Antia' households.

In addition to that, folk narratives and prose offer additional insights into the history of the Antia surname. An old Mengrelian song recounts a tale involving two peasants, Tutashkhia Antia and Kuzaia Shelia, set during the reign of Levan V Dadiani (1805-1850). The song, titled '*Si koul bata ma domtalenko*' (You are fleeing and leaving me behind), describes an incident in which two were captured in Lia village, near the banks of the Enguri river, a site which up to today is referred to by local residents as '*kuzia ginadinuphe*' or the 'place of Kuzia's disappearance,' signifying the spot where Kuzia Shelia was apprehended and his trail vanished. Tutashkhia Antia managed to escape the kidnappers (or slave traders) from Tsebela using skis all while hearing Antia's cries behind him as he fled (ქ.გ.ს 57). Tutashkhia Antia successfully made it back home, while Kuzaia Shelia was never seen again.

The 2014 census data revealed the presence of 42 Antia households within Chkaduashi village of the Zugdidi municipality. These households form a monogene settlement known as '*saantio*,' which is also frequently referred to as '*samokhio*.' "In Megrelia, villages are subdivided into entities known as '*samokhios*.' This division is optional and follows a territorial

principle. In the event of a death occurring within a *samokhio*, it is customary for the deceased's family members to invite a representative from each household within the Samokhio to attend the funeral. These representatives are obliged to attend the funeral and provide bereavement donations, referred to as as '*ginaforali*' (*literally 'roofing money'*) Historically, *samokhios* encompassed members of the same clan." (Samushia 1970; 574). Despite the apparent simplicity of the *samokhio* social institution, it is not uncommon to find families with various surnames residing within it. Notably, the Antia surname continues to fulfill the role of *samokhio* within Chkaduashi village to this day.

In summary, the origin of the Antia name and surname appears to have potential connections to a Roman saint, Georgian pagan gods, and a descriptive term for a color used in Guria. To ascertain the true origin of the Antia name and surname, it is imperative to continue our research and gather additional data. This remains a topic for future inquiry.

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