

**LAZ**, a people of South Caucasian stock (Iberic, "Georgian") now dwelling in the southeastern corner of the shores of the Black Sea, in the region called in Ottoman times Lazistān.

## 1. History and geography

The ancient history of the Laz is complicated by the uncertainty which reigns in the ethnical nomenclature of the Caucasus generally; the same names in the course of centuries are applied to different units (or groups). The fact that the name Phasis was applied to the Rion, to the Čorokh (the ancient Akampsis), and even to the sources of the Araxes, also creates difficulties.

The earliest Greek writers do not mention the Laz. The name Λαζοί, Λαζοί is only found after the Christian era (Pliny, *Nat. hist.*, iv, 4; *Periplus* of Arrian, xi, 2; Ptolemy, v, 9, 5). The oldest known settlement of the Lazoi is the town of Lazos or "old Lazik" which Arrian puts 680 stadia (about 80 miles) south of the Sacred Port (Novorossiisk) and 1,020 stadia (100 miles) north of Pityus, i.e. somewhere in the neighbourhood of Tuapse. Kiessling sees in the Lazoi a section of the Kerketai, who in the first centuries of the Christian era had to migrate southwards under pressure from the Zygoi (i.e. the Čerkes [q.v.]) who call themselves Adighe (Adzighe); the same author regards the Kerketai as a "Georgian" tribe. The fact is that at the time of Arrian (2nd century A.D.), the Lazoi were already living to the south of Sukhum. The order of the peoples living along the coast to the east of Trebizond was as follows: Colchi (and Sanni); Machelones; Heniochi; Zydritae; Lazai (Λαζοί), subjects of King Malassus, who owned the suzerainty of Rome; Apsilae; Abacsi [cf. abkhaz]; Sanigae near Sebastopolis (= Sukhum).

During the centuries following, the Laz gained so much in importance that the whole of the ancient Colchis had been renamed Lazica (Anonymous *Periplus*, *Fragm. hist. graec.*, v, 180). According to Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De administrando imperio*, ch. 53, in the time of Diocletian (284-303), the king of the Bosphorus, Sauromatus, invaded the land of the Lazoi and reached Halys (N. Marr explained this last name by the Laz word meaning "river"). Among the peoples subject to the Laz, Procopius (*Bell. Got.*, iv, 2, 3) mentions the Abasgoi and the people of Suania and Skymnia (= Lečkhum). It is probable that the name Lazica referred to the most powerful element and covered a confederation of several tribes. The Laz were converted to Christianity about the beginning of the 6th century. "In the desert of Jerusalem" Justinian (527-65) restored a Laz temple (Procopius, *De aedificiis*, v, 9), which must have been in existence for some time before this. The Laz also sent bishops to their neighbours (Procopius, *Bell. Got.*, iv, 2). In Colchis the Laz were under the suzerainty of the Roman emperors, who gave investiture to their kings, and the latter had to guard the western

passes of the Caucasus against invasions by the nomads from the north. On the other hand, the monopolistic tendencies of the commerce of Rome provoked discontent among the people of Colchis. In 458 King Gobazes sought the help of the Sāsānid Yazdagird II against the Romans. Between 539 and 562 Lazica was the scene of the celebrated struggle between Byzantium under Justinian and Persia under Khusraw I Anūshirwān.

According to Procopius, who accompanied Belisarius on his expeditions, the Laz occupied both banks of the Phasis, but their towns (Archaeopolis, Sebastopolis, Pitius, Skanda, Sarapanis, Rhodopolis, Mochoresis) all lay to the north of the river, while on the left bank, which was desert land, the lands of the Laz only stretched for a day's march to the south. Nearer to Trebizond were the "Roman Pontics", which only means that the inhabitants were direct subjects of the Roman emperor and not of the Laz kings; from the ethnic point of view, the "Roman Pontics" could not have been different from the Laz. This strip of shore continued longest to shelter the remnants of the Laz.

In 1204 with the aid of troops lent by queen Tamar of Georgia, Alexis Comnenus founded the empire of Trebizond, the history of which is very closely connected with that of the southern Caucasus. Nicephoros (v. 7) says that the founder of the dynasty had seized "the lands of Colchis and of the Lazes". In 1282 John Comnenus received the title of "Emperor of the East, of Ivoria and of the lands beyond the sea". In 1341 the princess Anna Anakhutlu ascended the throne with the help of the Laz. The lands directly under the authority of the emperors of Trebizond seem to have extended as far as Makriali, while Gonia was under a local dynasty (cf. the *Chronicle of Panaretos*, under the year 1376).

In 865/1461 the Ottoman Sultān Meḥemmed II conquered Trebizond, and as a result the Laz came into contact with Islam, which became their religion in the form of the Shāfi'ī madhhab. The stages of their conversion are still unknown. The fact is that, even in the central regions of Georgia (Akhaltzikhe), Islam seems to have gained ground gradually from the 13th century onwards (N. Marr, in *Bull. of the Acad. of St. Petersburg* [1917], 415-46, 478-506).

In 926/1519 Trebizond, with Batum, was made a separate *eyālet*. According to Ewliyā Čelebi, who went through this region in 1050/1640, the five *sandjak* s of the *eyālet* were: Djanikha (Djanilk = Samsun?), Trebizond, Güniya (Gonia) and Lower and Upper Batum. The modern Lazistān was governed from Gonia, for among the *kaḍā'* s of this fortress we find Atina, Sumla, Witče/Biče (= Witse) and Arkhwai (Ewliyā and the version of the *Djihān-nümā* in Fallmerayer, *Original-Fragmente*, in *Abh. d. Bayer. Akad.* [1846]). Hādīdjī Khalīfa and Ewliyā Čelebi, deceived by the similarity in sound of Caucasian names (as also was Vivien de St. Martin), proposed a theory of the identity of the name Lezgi and Laz. Ewliyā calls Trebizond the "former Lezgi *wilāyet*". Hādīdjī Khalīfa, after enumerating the peoples of the district of Lezgi as Mingrelians (Megril), Georgians, Abkhaz (Abaza), Čerkes and Laz, adds that the latter are those who live nearest to Trebizond. To the

south-east of Trebizond in the Čepni mountains he mentions the Turks who “worship as their God (*ma'būd*) the Shāh of Persia (i.e. are extreme Shī'īs) and are associated ( *mushtarik* ) with the Laz”. Hādjdjī K̄halifa and Ewliyā do not agree on the number of the fiefs of Trebizond; Ewliyā only says that the value of the *eyālet* has depreciated through the unruliness of many of its 41 *nāhiye* s (*Djihānnümā*, 429; Ewliyā, ii, 81, 83-5).

The first serious blow to the feudal independence of the *derebey* of Lazistān was only struck at the beginning of the 19th century by the Ottoman Pasha of Trebizond; but Koch, who visited the country after his expedition, still found most of the hereditary *derebey* s in power, although shorn of some of their liberties. He counted fifteen of them: Atina (two), Bulep, Artashin, Witse, Kapiste, Ark̄hawe, Kisse, K̄hopa, Makria (Makriali), Gonia, Batum, Maradit (Maradidi?), Perlewan and Čat. The lands of the three latter lay, however, on the Čorokh behind the mountains separating this valley from the river of Lazistān in the strict sense. On the other hand, among the *derebey* s of Lazistān was the lord of Hamshin, i.e. of the upper valleys of Kalopotamos and of Fortuna, inhabited by Muslim Armenians. According to the Armenian historian Levond, tr. Chahnazarian, Paris 1826, 162, the latter with their chief Hamam of the Amatuni family had settled in the district in the time of Constantine VI (780-97) (the old Tambur was given the name Hamshin < Hamamshen, “built by Hamam”). It is evidently this region that Clavijo (1403-6), ed. Srezniewski, St. Petersburg 1881, 383, calls “tierra de Arraquiel”. He adds that the people, dissatisfied with their king Arraquiel (Arakel?), submitted to the Muslim ruler of Ispir. The Hamshin are now Muslims, and only those of K̄hopa have not forgotten Armenian. A Hamshin lexicon was published by Kipshidze.

With the institution of the *wilāyets*, the *sandjak* of Lazistān became part of the *wilāyet* of Trebizond. Its capital was at first Batum but, after the Russian occupation of Batum in 1878, the administration of the *sandjak* was transferred to Rize (Rhizaion), detached for this purpose from the old central *sandjak* of Trebizond. That part of Lazistān lying to the west of the Ottoman-Russian frontier occupied a strip of coast 100 miles long and 15 to 20 miles broad. The *kaḍā'* s of the *sandjak* were: K̄hopa, Atina and Rize, subdivided again into 6 *nāhiye* s (Sāmī-Bey, *Ḳamūs al-a'lam*, v, 3966). Cuinet, *La Turquie d'Asie*, i, 118-21, mentions Of as a fourth *kaḍā'* and gives 8 (7) *nāhiye* s (Hamshin, Ḳaradere, MMapawri, Wakf, Kurā-yi sab'a, Witse, Ark̄hawi). In 1880 there were in the *sandjak* 364 inhabited places with 138,467 inhabitants, of whom 689 were Orthodox Greeks and the rest Muslims (Laz, Turkicised Laz, Turks and “Hamshin”). The number of true Laz cannot be more than half the total population.

The term Laz is used in the west of Turkey to designate generally the people of the country round the south-east of the Black Sea, but in reality the people calling themselves by this name and speaking the Laz language now live in the two *kaḍā'* s, modern *ilçes*: K̄hopa (between Kopmush and Gurup) and Atina (between Gurup and Kemer). Laz is spoken in 64 of the 69 villages of the *kaḍā'* or

*ilçe* of Atina. To these should be added the very few Laz who used to live in Russian territory to the south of Batum. These Laz were incorporated in Turkey by virtue of the Turco-Soviet treaty of 16 March 1921, which moved the Turkish frontier to Sarp (to the south of the mouth of the Čorokh). Rize and Batum are now outside the Laz country proper.

Due to its remoteness and to its proximity to the Russian frontier, Lazistān has only been marginally affected by the modernisation of Turkey in recent years. Communications are poor, and roads largely unmade. The ancient port of Hopa, which is the end of the line for passenger and mail steamers from Istanbul, has been equipped with a modern harbour which includes two massive artificial moles. At Sarp, which is only about 10 miles from the important Soviet port of Batum, there is a flourishing tea factory surrounded by the highly-productive plantations of this bush.

The Laz have traditionally been regarded as very conservative in their Islamic religion, and the old Turkish shadow theatre (Karagöz [*q.v.*]) and popular theatre (Orta oyunu [*q.v.*]) often portrayed the Laz as slow-witted rustics; a Turkish proverb stated that “a Muslim does not eat Laz jelly”, *Lazların termonu müsülman yemez onu* (*termoni* < Greek θέρηος). In fact, despite a long-established reputation for brigandage and for smuggling goods across the Turco-Russian frontier, the modern Laz are highly intelligent. They are skilled tillers of the soil, and were in the past often to be found in the towns of eastern Turkey as gardeners. Today they are to be found in towns all over Turkey in their traditional calling of bakers and pastrycooks; before the First World War many Laz went to Russia to work as bakers, and often returned with Russian wives who became converts to Islam. They are shrewd and enterprising businessmen, and have secured a large portion of the real estate market in Istanbul. When modern educational opportunities are available to them, they readily respond to this stimulus. They are also excellent sailors, and form a large proportion of the crews of many Turkish vessels.

## 2. Language

The Laz language is closely connected with Mingrelian (which is a sister language of Georgian), but N. Y. Marr found in it sufficient peculiarities to consider it a Mingrelian language rather than a dialect. In the Lazo-Mingrelian group he believed that he could find resemblances to the more Indo-European elements in old Armenian (Grabar). There are two Laz languages, eastern, and western with smaller subdivisions (the language of the Čkhala). Laz is very full of Turkish words. It has no written literature, but there are local poets (Rashīd Hilmī, Pehliwān-oghlu, etc.). The Laz are forgetting their own language, which is being replaced by the Turkish patois of Trebizond (cf. Pisarev in *Zapiski VOIRAO* [1901], xiii, 173-201), in which the harmony of the vowels is much neglected (cf. a specimen in Marr, *Teksti i raziskaniya*, St. Petersburg, vii, 55).

The Georgians call the Laz Č'an, but the Laz do not know this name. "Č'an" is evidently the original of the Greek name Sannoi/Tzannoi, and it survives in the official name of the *sandjak* of Samsun (Djanik). From the historical point of view, the separation of the Laz and Č'an seems to have taken place, in spite of the close relationship between the two of them. In the time of Arrian, the Sannoi were the immediate neighbours of Trebizond. In an obscure passage in this author (cf. the perplexed commentary of C. Müller, in *Geogr. graeci minores*, ad *Arriani Peripl.*, 8), he places on the river of the frontier between the Colchians (Laz?) and the θουαυνιαη (?). Koch mentions the interesting fact that the people of Of speak a "language of their own", and according to Marr, the people of Khoshnishin (near Atina) speak an incomprehensible language. Procopius places the "Sannoi who are now called the Tzannoi" on the area adjoining the mountains separating Čorokh from the sea (the Parayadres range, the name of which survives in the modern Parkhar/Balkhar). Marr's researches showed that the Č'an (Tzannoi) had at first occupied a larger area, including the basin of the Čorokh and its tributaries on the right bank, from which they were temporarily displaced by the Armenians and finally by the Georgians (K'art'li). The chronicles of Trebizond continue to distinguish the Laz from the Tzianids (ζιανίδες). The latter in alliance with the Muslims attacked the possessions of Trebizond in 1348, and in 1377 were punished by the Emperor. At this period the Tzianids must have been in the southwest of Trebizond (besides, the *sandjak* of Djanik is to the west of this port). Thus the Georgian application of the name Č'an to the Laz may be explained by the confusion of the two tribes one of whom (the true Č'an living to the south and west of the Laz) was ultimately thrust to the west of Trebizond.

## Bibliography

1. History and geography . The principal Byzantine sources are found in Dietrich, *Byzantinische Quellen zur Länder- und Völkerkunde*, Leipzig 1912, i, 52-8

Dubois de Montpéroux, *Voyage autour du Caucase*, Paris 1839, ii, 73, and the *Atlas* , series i, pl. xiv.: map of the theatre of wars of Lazika

Vivien de St. Martin, *Études de géographie ancienne*, Paris 1852, ii, 196-218: *Étude sur la Lazique de Procope*

Hermann, Lazai and Kiessling, *Heniochoi*, in *Pauly-Wissowa*<sup>2</sup>, xxiii, 1042, and viii, 258-80

Koch, *Wanderungen im Oriente. ii. 4 Reisen im pontischen Gebirge*, Weimar 1846-7

Bianchi, *Viaggi in Armenia, Kurdistan e Lazistan*, Milan 1863 (the author did not visit Lazistān proper)

Kazbek, *Tri mesiatza v turetskoi Gruzii*, in *Zap. Kavk. Otd. Geogr. Obšč* (Tiflis 1875), x/i, 1-140

Deyrolle, *Lazistan et Arménie, tour du monde*, 1875-6

- Vivien de St. Martin, *Lazistan*, in *Nouv. Dict. Géogr. Universelle*, Paris 1887
- Murray's *handbook for travellers in Asia Minor, Transcaucasia, Persia, etc.*, London 1875, 210
- Proskuriakov, *Zametki o Turtsii*, in *Zap. Kavk. Otd. Geogr. Obšč.* (1905), xxv.
- N. Y. Marr, *Iz poezdki v turetskii Lazistan*, in *Bull. de l'Acad. Imp. des Sciences de St. Pétersbourg* (1910), 547-70, 607-32
- idem, *Gruzin. pripiski greč. Evangelia iz Koridii*, in *ibid.* (1911), 217
- idem, *Kreshčeniye armian, etc.*, in *Zapiski VOIRAO* (1905), xxvi, 165-71
- G. Vechapéli, *La Géorgie turque*, Berne 1919, 1-52 (Georgian nationalist point of view)
- Admiralty handbook, Turkey*, London 1942, i, 234-5, 346-7
- D. C. Hill, *My travels in Turkey*, London 1964, 100-18
- A. Bryer, *The last Laz risings and the downfall of the Pontic Derebeys, 1812-1840*, in *Bedi Kartlisa, Revue de Kartvélogie*, xxvi (Paris 1969), 191-210
- N. Lomouri, *History of the kingdom of Egrissi (Lazica) from its origins to the fifth century A.D.*, in *Bedi Kartlisa*, xxvi (1969), 211-16 (= a summary of the author's monograph published by Tiflis University Press 1968)
- M. Pereira, *East of Trebizond*, London 1971, 213-24. ¶
2. Language and literature . G. Rozen, *Über die Sprachen d. Lazen*, in *Abh. Bayr. Ak. W.* (1843) Phil.-Hist. Cl., 1-38
- Peacock, *Original vocabularies of five West-Caucasian languages*, in *JRAS*, xix (1887), 145-56
- Adjarian, *Étude sur la langue laze*, in *MSL*, x (1899), 145-60, 228-40, 364-401, 405-48
- Marr, *Grammatika c'anskago (lazskago) yazıka*, St. Petersburg 1910 (= Grammar, chrestomathie, glossary)
- Kipshidze, *Dopoln. svedeniya o č'anskom yazıke*, St. Petersburg 1911
- G. Dumézil, *Contes lazes*, Travaux et mémoires de l'Institut d'Ethnologie, Univ. de. Paris, Paris 1937
- A. S. Čik'obava, *Č'anur-megrul-k'art'uli shedarebit'i lek'sikoni*, Tiflis 1938 (= Laz-Mingrelian-Georgian comparative dictionary, with text in Georgian but summaries in Russian and French)
- E. A. Bokarev et alii, eds., *Yazıki narodov SSSR. iv. Iberiisko-Kavkazskie yazıki*, Moscow 1967, 62-76 (on the Laz language, here called *Zanski yazık* and classed as Mingrelo-Laz)
- Irine Asat'iani, *Č'anuri (lazuri) rek'srebi, i* ["Č'an or Laz texts, i"], Tiflis/T'bilisi 1974.