Studying Kartvelian/Caucasian Languages in the Soviet Period and Today

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Rosemary Sullivan in her 2015-book *Stalin's Daughter: The Extraordinary and Tumultuous Life of Svetlana Alliluyeva*, describes one relevant aspect of the restrictions imposed by the Soviet system in the mid-1970s as follows: "[V]irtually no citizens of the Soviet Union were permitted to travel, unsupervised, outside the Eastern bloc, and any and all contacts with foreigners inside the USSR were still considered treasonous".[1] And it was bang in the middle of the 1970s when I arrived in Tbilisi in September 1975, following in the footsteps of my fellow-countrywoman Liz Fuller, who went on to make a career as commentator on Transcaucasian politics for Radio Liberty, and the two Americans, Dee Ann Holisky and Alice Harris, both of whom entered academia as kartvelologist-caucasologists – Liz and Dee were still in Tbilisi when I arrived. As I have never discussed it with her, I cannot say at what precise stage of her studies (with my predecessor at SOAS, David Lang) it was when Liz chose to pursue them in Georgia, but it was in furtherance of postgraduate studies that I and my American predecessors made this move. My sojourn was arranged as follows.

Having decided I wished to spend a full academic year in Georgia, the only way was for me to approach the British Council (BC), which operated the British side of the Cultural Agreement with the USSR, this Agreement being the basis for educational exchanges. As a post-graduate/doctoral applicant I had to undergo an interview at the BC's London headquarters. I have a vague memory of sitting in front of the panel, whose members I had to convince to recommend to their Soviet partners that I was worthy of acceptance. What I completely fail to remember is how I argued that I deserved to be sent to Tbilisi to learn Georgian rather than to Yerevan to further my work on Armenian, for at the time I was registered in Cambridge for research on a comparative-contrastive study of Ancient Greek and Old Armenian subordinate-clause syntax. Whatever I said obviously did the trick! Whether undergraduates, who mostly (I think) spent less than a year in the USSR as part of their BA degree-courses, were also summoned for an interview or if they were simply approved on the basis of a recommendation from their university, I cannot say. But after being approved by the interviewing panel, one then had to wait firstly to see if the Soviets raised any objections and secondly to learn in which city one would be placed. Plainly most of those applying to study in the USSR were likely to want to be based in Russia itself (and ideally in either Moscow or Leningrad, as it then was), and not all were fortunate to find themselves allocated their desired city as their designated place of study. This was certainly true of the one other Briton dispatched to Tbilisi in 1975, but, as the sole individual applying to study Georgian with stated preference for Tbilisi, it would have been ludicrous for me to have been sent anywhere else.

Once accepted for study in one's chosen centre, it might be expected that there would be no pitfalls along the way to reaching that designated centre on time. In fact, as things turned out, there *were* none, but the BC warned our mixed group of under- and post-graduates that, whilst the Soviet Embassy *should* issue all the necessary visas at the latest on the morning of departure from Fenchurch Street station for the train to Tilbury Docks, where we would board the SS Baltika for the five-day voyage to Leningrad, it was not unknown for no visas to be ready, and, if that were to happen, we would all have to go home and await further news. But fate smiled on us (the visas being issued on the very morning of our departure), and, after reaching

[1] Sullivan 2015: 421–422.

Leningrad, those who would study there were taken to their lodgings, whilst the rest of us eventually travelled on by train to Moscow, and thence, in the case of those not remaining in the capital, to our allotted destinations. After a couple of days on the train, my companion, Graham (an ergonomist), and I arrived in Tbilisi to be ferried to our room in Vake District's Student Village by Shota, head of the University's *Inotdel*, which was charged with helping (or quite often hindering) foreign visitors when it came to organising visas and travel-arrangements for visits and/or study-trips within the USSR and ultimately for return to one's homeland.

If anyone already appointed to a lectureship (or higher) desired to spend time (e.g. a sabbatical) in the USSR, it was not the British Council through which the kind of process I have just outlined was handled but the British Academy (or the Royal Society for hard scientists). And then, one's stay was under the auspices not of the University but the relevant Union Academy. This is how I, as lecturer in Linguistics, was able to spend my sabbatical from Hull University in the autumn-term of 1987 in Tbilisi. And it was not in the Student Village (then in Bagebi) but in a hotel that accommodation was provided.

So, my official status in Georgia for my two post-graduate visits was that of a *stazhër* ('trainee'). I was informed how much my monthly stipend would be – though all foreigners were faced with the same living-costs, the amount of the stipend depended on the recipient's nationality and the nature of the financial agreement negotiated by the Soviet authorities in the Cultural Agreement reached with (in my case) the BC; and a Briton's stipend, though adequate, was by no means the most generous! I was told that my overall supervisor would be the late Tamaz Gamqrelidze, a natural choice given his international standing and mastery of English, whilst my designated personal language-tutor would be the late Shukia Apridonidze, who at that time held a post in the Toponymics' Department. We were introduced to each other, and she explained that we would meet in a side-room (actually a storage-room) of her Department three times a week for three hours each on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, and that she intended to speak only in Georgian. With the date of our first session entered in the diary, we parted.

Though Shukia had taught Dee Ann Holisky and Alice Harris the previous year, she did not teach all foreign students arriving with the intention of learning Georgian. How she was chosen and assigned to which visitor, or if she herself was allowed to review applications and decide whom she wished to take under her wing, I cannot say because I never asked. Nor do I know if she received additional payment for the hours she spent in my company. I can only hope that she was satisfactorily remunerated, because she regularly devoted more than 9 hours per week to me, regularly taking me to the Tea House after lessons, occasionally flagging down a private car (standard payment being one rouble per journey) for a trip to the Film Studios where she had arranged private shewings of Georgian films, or inviting me to events (such as a performance of the Sukhishvili-Ramishvili Dance Ensemble on my birthday) or just to meet interesting individuals. It is no secret that Shukia, who died in the spring of 2022, was regarded as the best of the language-teachers and, as Dee Holisky said when she learnt that I would be in Shukia's hands, I was extremely lucky that she had been assigned to me, for, apart from her native mentoring talent, she was full of energy and determination that her pupils should gain the maximum possible benefit from their time in her beloved Georgia.

So, without the use of any technical aids and relying solely on exposure to the language with the use of pen and paper for taking essential grammatical notes and vocabulary, my learning process, which could be described as Shukia putting flesh on the bones of Georgian grammar, familiar to me from the grammars of Hans Vogt and Kita Tschenkéli, could hardly have been better. Of course, if one wanted some more formal (and legible) record of items hurriedly scribbled by hand in notes, one might imagine it would be possible to buy a Georgian typewriter

(remember this was in the days before personal computers). As I never looked for one, I cannot say if they could easily be bought. However, during my second year (1979–80), a Lithuanian post-graduate (Leta(s) Palmaitis) told me he had managed to have the Georgian characters cut on appropriate pieces of metal so that he could have them replace the characters on a standard (for him presumably Cyrillic) typewriter. I did eventually acquire a Georgian typewriter in a swap – the late Maia Matchavariani wanted an English machine, and so I took her one I bought in the UK, and she gave me her somewhat clunkier Georgian machine. Today it is an unused archival relic, alongside its English, Russian and specially adapted Abkhaz companions – so the ease with which one can now switch from script to script with a click or two on a computer-keyboard is one aspect at least of technical progress which meets with my wholehearted approval! But practical acquisition of Georgian was not my sole aim in being in the Caucasus. In addition to spoken Georgian classes I wanted to have theoretical instruction in a Northwest, Northeast and North Central Caucasian language, but I needed to receive that tuition in English. I raised the possibility with Gamqrelidze, not really knowing if the academic establishment in Georgia was in any way obliged under the terms of the UK's Cultural Agreement to meet my request. Happily, Gamqrelidze told me that the now sadly departed Zaza Kiknadze was prepared to give me an hour a week each to guide me through the grammars of Avar and Chechen. As I had spent over a month in a Circassian (Abzakh) village in Anatolia in 1974, when I also had the privilege of making recordings for a week in Istanbul with the last Ubykh speaker, Tevfik Esenç, I had hoped that Circassian would have been the NW language, but there was no-one in Tbilisi's linguistic community who could discuss it in English. However, Gamqrelidze offered me the option of studying with Inga Shaduri, who was also willing to give me an hour per week of her time for Abkhaz, the Northwest language about which I knew the least at that time. So, this serendipitous moment is how my association with Abkhaz began. As with Shukia, I have no idea if Zaza and Inga were financially rewarded for everything they did for me throughout the year.[2]

If arranging language-classes turned out to be a straightforward matter, what about study-trips away from Tbilisi? The letter informing me that I had an official placement in Tbilisi stated that study-trips would be decided after arrival there, and Dee Holisky urged me not to delay in submitting travel-plans, as otherwise she warned that they might be rejected. So, I wrote that I wished to visit Maykop (in Adyghea), Makhachkala (in Daghestan) and Sukhum (in Abkhazia) – I probably also included Mestia (Svanetia), but, as things turned out, the journey to that magical location had to wait through lack of time for a later visit to Soviet Georgia – and went to the relevant operative, the late Jemal Akobia, at the Ministry of Education to submit the document. He expressed his surprise, telling me that he already had a plan in his desk-drawer submitted in my name and shewed it to me. As I recall, the only place slated for a visit was the Manuscripts' Institute in Yerevan (Armenia), the *Matenadaran*. "Well, I never wrote this," I said, requesting that he replace it with my authentic document. He was clearly embarrassed at this turn of events. It later transpired that Shukia had authored the earlier one, having been asked to do so on the basis of my stated academic interests. Her conclusion was logical, as I had come to the study of Georgian via Old Armenian, but by this time (autumn 1975) I had no intention of travelling south.

[2] I should also thank Eter Chkhotua for help with translation into Georgian of some 600 sentences designed to test syntactic structure and, during my second year, Nana Shengelaia, as well as for private lessons in Old Georgian the distinguished colleague who opened the Frankfurt conference, Mzekala Shanidze, to whom I say: დიდი მადლობა, ქ-ნო მზექალა – 'Many thanks, Mzekala!'.

I planned to make Maykop my first destination early in January 1976. The late Asker Gadagatl, head of the relevant institute in Maykop, had assured my late Circassian friend, Alec Abregov, whom I had met on the same evening I met my future wife, Abkhazian Zaira Khiba, that all would be ready when he and I reached Adyghea's capital. So, I duly applied to the *Inotdel* for my visa. My suitcase was packed, but, when I went to pick up the visa, I was told that an official response had been received from Gadagatl's Institute stating that there was no reason for me to undertake such a journey, since the USSR's leading expert on Circassian was available for consultation in Tbilisi – this was the late Giorgi Rogava, a Mingrelian, husband of Georgia's leading abkhazologist, the late Ketevan Lomtatidze! Thus thwarted, I would not be seeing Maykop – not until June 1992, that is.

My next application was for a visa to spend the month of April in Sukhum. This time, everything passed off smoothly, though the *Inotdel* boss (Merab, by this stage) could not understand why I requested they obtain a bus-ticket for the 12–13 hour journey rather than for the overnight sleeper-train – I simply wanted to see the countryside, of course! Though disappointed to find how few people seemed to know Georgian in Sukhum, I was able to make some useful contacts for my many future visits.

This, then, left Makhachkala, where I planned to undertake a two-week trip in May. Once again a visa-application was submitted. When, pondering what excuse would be deployed to prevent my travelling, I returned to the *Inotdel* to learn of the decision, Merab, sitting at his desk at the end of the longish, narrow room, started by saying that there was no objection to such a trip. So far, so good. But then came the 'but'. Apparently the accommodation-block was undergoing the dreaded *remont* ('refurbishing'), which meant that I would have to stay in a hotel and defray the costs myself. He stood up and started to walk me to the door with a comforting arm around my shoulder. Knowing the charges imposed on foreigners in Soviet hotels, I quickly calculated that I had enough *valuta* ('hard currency') to cover a stay of 10 days. So, I told him to go ahead, get the visa and make the booking. At once his arm fell from my shoulder as he asked if I really had sufficient funds. "Yes," was my curt reply. Leaving the office, I went immediately to the Communications' Ministry and placed a call to the BC representative at the British Embassy in Moscow, a Mr. Anderson, Assistant Cultural Attaché. I asked him to confirm that a *stazhër*'s appointed university had to defray all costs associated with officially approved study-trips. He did so. Thereupon I asked him to send a note reminding my *Inotdel* of this fact and demanding that they pay for my stay at Makhachkala's Intourist Hotel. Having stated there were no official objections to the visit, they had no choice but to comply. So, I flew and returned by bus, which enabled me not only to say that I had not only set foot on Chechen soil (Grozny bus-station in pre-destruction days) and on North Ossetian soil (Ordzhonikidze/Vladikavkaz bus-station) but also to travel along the whole of the Georgian Military Highway.

Back in Tbilisi, I visited the *Inotdel*. Merab asked how my stay had been, adding, with a telling smile, that it had cost them a fortune! He knew that I knew that they had lied to me. The fact was that, whilst decisions on travel within Georgia's borders lay with Tbilisi, Moscow had to be consulted for permission to move beyond those borders – at the time, Maykop, as an oil-producing city was probably off-limits to foreigners, whereas Daghestan might have been a sensitive area because of possible ethno-religious tensions, which in later years were to explode in awful ways. So, why not just admit this to be the case at the outset, rather than dissemble and devise ridiculous arguments to frustrate one's hopes? Lying was the immediate recourse in response to my request for a rail-ticket from Tbilisi to Istanbul when my Soviet visa (extended in the wake of my marriage) finally expired. "There's no such train, you'll have to go home via Moscow," Merab asserted. Back at the Student Village, a German fellow-*stazhër* (for physics)

had a copy of the official pan-Soviet railway-timetable, which clearly indicated that a Moscow-Tbilisi-Istanbul service ran twice a week. I returned to Merab and handed him the timetable. He then accompanied me to the Intourist Hotel (the *Iveria*), where tickets were issued. There, they still evinced unease, but Merab told them to go ahead – a slight change (by hand) of the expiry-date on my extended visa was necessary, but at least it was another's hand that did the deed, even if the suggestion *was* mine! [The visa, issued after the booking was made, expired on 3 August, but the train left Tbilisi on the 5th, and so, after much ado, the hand-written '3' was filled out to turn it into '8'].

Academic study requires books (at least it did in those days!), and so how easy was it to obtain them along with other items of interest (e.g. records/cassettes featuring local languages, regional maps)? Not knowing the state of the book-market in Tbilisi, I asked Alice Harris when I met her in Cambridge on her way to Georgia in the summer of 1974 if she could try to obtain for me a copy of Varlam Topuria's book on the Svan verb, naively thinking that, as its 2nd, enlarged edition had been published only seven years earlier, it might still be on open sale somewhere. On 4 July 1975 she wrote that she was still hoping to be given the work herself, in which case she said: "I will make you a copy if you want. I have not been able to have anything copied here, to my great astonishment."[3] She generously sent me a parcel of 5 volumes, including the then recently published 'Georgian Versions of the Pauline Epistles', and I take this opportunity publicly to thank her. From Alice's letter I inferred that important caucasological works, which usually had a *tirazh* ('print-run') of 1,000, probably did not remain long on the shelves of bookshops. This inference was confirmed when I arrived myself. One day I was walking along the main thoroughfare and noticed a mass of people outside a small bookshop and, in good Soviet fashion, joined the throng in expectation of obtaining something worth having. A blue-backed book was being eagerly purchased straight from the packing-boxes before it could even be placed on the shelves – it was the late Togo Gudava's hot-off-the-press 'Mingrelian Texts. I. Poetry',[4] and it sold out before any copies went on display! In 1979 I was given advanced warning where and when a particularly significant book would be going on sale by its editor, the late Ivane Imnaishvili. This was 'The Two Last Redactions of the Georgian Gospels'.[5] I asked Imnaishvili how easy it was to publish such a work in an officially atheist state. He replied that winning permission to publish was only achieved because of the inclusion of the lengthy study that he composed for it, thereby lending the work an academic (rather than purely religious) justification.

The solution to the acquisition-problem was partly to pay frequent visits to the second-hand bookshops, where one could find really valuable (possibly old) items for what to a foreigner was a mere pittance. Another was to contact authors directly to see if they had copies of their works they could present to you – I believe authors received no payment based on the number of sales, and because they usually seemed to have plenty of copies to distribute in this way, they were quite happy to respond to such requests. It was probably as a result of Arnold Chikobava's instruction when we met in January 1976 to the librarian of the Linguistic Institute's library to make a gift to me of several old and rare titles that I made a useful discovery, namely that libraries and/or individual academic institutes had stores of books to be used for exchanges with other libraries and/or parallel institutes. As a result I decided that I would approach individuals with the relevant authority to grant me permission to acquire works of interest from these so-

[3] Personally, I only ever once needed to have a few pages of statistics photocopied. This was during my sabbatical-stay in 1987, and the Public Library kindly produced the copies without demur.
[4] Gudava 1975.
[5] Imnaishvili 1979.

called *gatsvliti pondebi* ('exchange-funds'). I must admit that I pursued this practice in an absolutely shameless way and obtained many books that I would otherwise never even have seen. The only 'fund' into which I was given actual physical access was in the basement of Tbilisi State University (TSU), which was a real treasure-trove.[6] In other cases, I would ask this or that director if a specific volume was available – as, for instance, I did with the late Prof. Elene Metreveli at the Manuscripts' Institute, whom I approached for the one volume of the eight-volume Academy Dictionary of Georgian, namely the notoriously difficult to find volume IV – if memory serves, I had been alerted to its presence in their 'fund' by the late Lili Khevsuriani. Prof. Metreveli kindly agreed to my request.[7]

Whilst general maps were on sale, any depicting highly detailed information would probably not have been publicly available as they would have been deemed to have military significance. Since I cannot claim to have actively searched for such maps, the only anecdote I can relate is that, when my then-future wife and I went to visit the head of the Caucasian language section at Makhachkala University, Prof. Gajdarov, in 1976, I asked if he could tell us where we could find a map of Daghestan. He opened the drawer of his desk, produced a rolled-up map, and, manifestly worried about being heard (maybe even seen?) delivering such an item into the hands of a Westerner, made a shew of addressing Zaira, with the words: "Zaira, I am presenting *you* with this map."

In summation I cannot personally claim to have suffered or knowingly to have been placed under any kind of surveillance by the Soviet authorities during my two post-graduate study-trips, my one sabbatical as university-lecturer, or the various family-visits made to the Soviet Caucasus. In this respect my experience was different from that of historian Ronald Suny, who told me when we bumped into each other in Marjanishvili Square shortly before he and his wife returned to America at the start of 1976 that he was being followed everywhere he went, warning me to be careful. In view of the fact that within days of our arrival in Tbilisi Graham and I had been taken by Liz Fuller to meet "someone special", as she put it, we might have had a close call, for we had no idea that we would be visiting the house of Merab Kostava, and, even if we had been told his name, we would at that stage have been none the wiser, being entirely ignorant of the position he held even then among the dissident-community. While we were in his house, someone else came in and sat on the floor beside me. I asked him why he was looking so glum. "The KGB today killed my dog," was the unexpected reply given by none other than Zviad Gamsakhurdia! I never did ask Liz why she had put us at risk by thinking it a wise move to introduce us to that pair, who were later to be arrested and imprisoned (though Gamsakhurdia made a pathetic TV-recantation and was released) and who went on to lead Georgia's disastrous (as I would describe it) independence-movement 13 years later. Nevertheless, a scurrilous (not to say libellous) work of 2021 abstracted from the author's doctoral [*sic*] dissertation for TSU in 2015 and published in 'Proceedings of Sokhumi State

[6] I thank Lamara Meskhishvili in the cataloguing section for persuading the director, Shota Apakidze, to allow me access to roam the shelves and take whatever I wanted. If I am not mistaken, I arranged for Bernard Outtier (and possibly Winfried Boeder) also to be granted access.

[7] I thank everyone, including Aelita Meskhi in the cataloguing section at the Academy Library who regularly offered me new publications, for their generous help in enabling me to build my private archive of Caucasian materials. I should also mention Marina Chelidze of GOGS, the organisation that liaised with expatriot Georgians and students of Georgian like me, for packing and sending to England the books that I acquired during my post-graduate stays; she also sent (unrequested) each volume of the Soviet Georgian Encyclopaedia as they were published, the de-luxe 1983 multi-language edition of 'The Martyrdom of Shushanik' (Egadze 1983; see Fig. 4), and the luxurious 1988 facsimile-edition of D. Kartvelishvili's 1888 edition of 'The Man in the Panther-skin', with illustrations by M. Zichi (Rustaveli 1888).

University, Humanities and Socio-Political Sciences Series' by one Gela Tsaava (apparently of the so-called 'Georgian-American University') *might* contain a grain of truth in respect of the following comment about high-level official attitudes to foreigners in the USSR: "In the 70s of the XXth century there was a striking renewal in Western countries of the activity of scholars – so-called caucasologists and kartvelologists – studying the history and languages of the peoples of the Caucasus. Soviet specialists viewed them as the West's ideological saboteurs who, under the cover of studying the history and languages of the peoples of the said regions, were gathering materials on themes and problems which were subject to taboo by Soviet censorship" (My translation). Tsaava goes on to assert: "One such kartvelologist is George Hewitt."[8]

I am guessing, but I doubt that arousing the attention of the local security services should be a concern for any foreign language-student in Georgia today, though the same can probably not be said of those attracted to studying any of the North Caucasian languages on their home-territories.

I think it was some time in the 1990s that Tbilisi instituted summer-schools for foreigners wanting to learn Georgian, and today I imagine anyone with sufficient funds can freely travel and arrange tuition, be it for Georgian, Mingrelian, Svan or any other language spoken in Georgia, without the need for seeking official sanction from such a body as the BC. Alternatively, of course, they could stay at home and investigate resources on the Net.

Publishing (even including materials on/in Mingrelian and Svan[9] – thanks, it seems, largely to the efforts of Buba Kudava at Artanuji Press) is, as far as I can see from a distance, flourishing. One thing to bear in mind when taking books out of the country is that I have been told that sending/taking abroad works published prior to 1995 without a licence is problematic (an odd restriction that seems to have been inherited from Soviet practice, which is also still reflected in Russia, where the movable bar applies to published items over 50 years of age).

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Thus far I have been on firm ground, but, when it comes to discussing advances in technology (specifically computing), I feel the earth metaphorically beginning to collapse beneath my feet. I suppose my first introduction to a work produced by a computer was in 1972/3. The topic I was advised to investigate by my supervisor, Alan Sommerstein, for the Cambridge Diploma in Linguistics was 'Semantic Aspects of Complementation in Latin', which would have been impossible without access to the then-recent publication of the 'Concordance to the Works of Livy'. "Great to have such a useful research-tool," I momentarily thought, never conceiving that the means to produce such a body of data would one day be available to individual researchers possessing in their homes appropriately powerful personal computers and relevant

[8] "XX საუკუნის 70-იან წლებში დასავლეთის ქვეყნების თვალში საცემად განახლდა კავკასიის ხალხების ისტორიისა და ენების შემსწავლელი მეცნიერების ე. წ. კავკასიოლოგებისა და ქართველოლოგების აქტიურობა. საბჭოთა სპეცსამსახურები მათ განიხილავდნენ, როგორც დასავლეთის იდეოლოგიურ დივერსანტებს, რომლებიც აღნიშნული რეგიონების ხალხების ისტორიისა და ენების შესწავლის საფარით აგროვებდნენ მასალებს საბჭოთა ცენზურისაგან ტაბუდადებულ თემებსა და პრობლემატიკაზე. ერთ-ერთი ასეთი ქართველოლოგია ჯორჯ ჰიუიტი" (Tsaava 2020–21: 427). This is unsurprising, given that Tsaava's 'academic' article is entitled 'Brian George Hewitt's "Abkhazian sympathies" and anti-Georgian attitudes'. Equally unsurprising is that I would not include this work in any list of recommended reading!

[9] We should, of course, remember that during the Soviet period from the late 1930s the publishing of materials on/in Georgian's sister-languages was essentially for the benefit of specialists rather than native-speakers themselves, as part of the official line to discourage these populations from viewing themselves as anything other than 'Georgians'.

software once a given work (or set of works) had been typed into a computer and thus brought into digital existence. It is now painful to imagine what immense time and labour will have been expended on compiling the only other concordances which I have had occasion to consult over the years (viz. those to 1. the King James Bible, 2. the Georgian Gospels, compiled by Ivane Imnaishvili, and 3. Rust(a)veli's national epic, compiled by Akaki Shanidze).

During classes for the Linguistics' Diploma we had watched a demonstration of how to use a spectrograph, and at some point I managed to fiddle about with the cumbersome machine in a manner appropriate enough to produce spectrograms from my Ubykh recordings of 1974 in order to compose my article 'The labialised sibilants of Ubykh (North West Caucasian)' in 1986, which finally decided the question of which were the plain series to which the labialised variants belonged. Today, no doubt such an exercise could be accomplished in no time at all and without the fiddling about that was necessary at the time.

At some point in the late 1970s it was brought home to me how advances in photography could be used to reveal writing not immediately visible. I was approached by someone who had been at the Iviron Monastery on Mt. Athos and had somehow made a microfilm of a previously unknown Georgian under-text he had discovered hidden beneath another palimpsest-text. Maybe the relevant technique was widely known at the time, but it was new to me. The photographer, wisely not wishing to trust the Soviet postal service, asked if I could convey the film safely to the Manuscripts' Institute in Tbilisi. I must have done so, as I have a letter from then-Director Elene Metreveli dated 18 April 1979 thanking me for delivering it. As we have seen/heard during this conference, such discoveries are by no means uncommon today.

So many technological developments have simply passed me by. One example will suffice to illustrate this. After 44 years of determined searching for, and acquisition of, books relating to caucasology (particularly in the fields of language, history and perhaps to a lesser extent literature) I decided in 2019 to bite the bullet and draw up a list of my Caucasian holdings, knowing that it would be a mammoth task – it took me several months to complete. It currently runs to 428 A4 pages. When I was about 200 pages into the compilation, my older daughter casually asked me what 'programme' I was using. I asked what she meant. You can imagine her reply about the advantage of entering the data in appropriate fields of some general template for ease of retrieval and classification! My reaction? "Well, I'm not about to re-start the process now," I told her. A list it began, and just a list it remains – so no change of paradigm here, I'm afraid!

Despite what I have said, I did participate in one joint-project that allows scholars to work concurrently on producing the best, most accurate translation of the Bible into local languages. This used the Summer Institute of Linguistics' *Paratext* software, through which invited specialists can access a prepared translation of this/that book of the Bible in order to correct mistakes or offer suggestions for greater accuracy in rendering the original in a new language. The ultimate controller of the said text can take these comments into account or not. My role was to check the translation into Abkhaz of the Gospels by Abkhazian writer Mushni Lasuria, who had worked from Russian, by comparing this text with the Greek. While entering remarks on *Paratext*'s pages, I was editing my wife's earlier translations prepared for the Institute for Bible Translation, once centred in Stockholm but now housed in Moscow, typing them up on computer (having originally performed this task in the 1980s on the specially adapted typewriter mentioned earlier with a carbon-copy kept for reference at home), and so having them available for distribution to interested parties in PDF-format.[10]

[10] I might add that I have not the slightest idea what attention has (or has not) been paid to my numerous comments on Lasuria's version.

Having mentioned PDF-formatting, I wonder if this might not be the most immediately widespread advantage of being in the digital age, because once a text or audio-recording or video-recording is on a computer, files such as PDFs for textual material can be prepared for instant dissemination to interested individuals (or more widely on the Net/YouTube, as long as copyright is not infringed). While putting the finishing touches to this paper I received two PDFs of Georgian publications from correspondents in Tbilisi, one being our colleague who opened this very conference – so many thanks again to Mzekala Shanidze! – BUT, despite the undoubted usefulness of the opportunities opened up in the wonderful world of PDFs, a worrying question arises for such as me, namely: what is the future of the book? Many of my generation are simply not comfortable reading lengthy materials on a computer-screen and prefer to be able to turn pages on something in one's hands. But there's no turning back the dial of history. However, I have to say there's nothing in the realm of technology to equal:

(a) the thrill of stumbling across treasures in second-hand bookshops, such as happened in Tbilisi in my favourite *bukinist* (on Rustaveli Avenue near the Rustaveli statue in the district known as *Zemeli)* where I found these two rare tomes within two months of each other (November 1979 – January 1980) – volume 1 of *Ibero-Caucasica* (1946) and Ketevan Lomtatidze's description of the Tapanta dialect (of 1944),[11] which latter has the smallest *tirazh* (just 150) of any book currently in my possession (see Fig. 1) and

(b) the sheer delight of owning facsimile-copies of King Vakhtang's first printed edition of *The Man in the Panther-skin* (see Fig. 2 with the 1975 publication on the left and the 1937 predecessor on the right, and Fig. 3 with the initial pages).[12]

These volumes are truly things of beauty, something I doubt I shall ever be saying of a PDF, however important the content, though, having seen David Maisuradze's presentation of Georgian palaeographic fonts, perhaps I should be looking forward to receiving more PDFs and even e-mail correspondence featuring some of those real beauties.

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[11] Observant readers examining the covers of these tomes will notice that the Lomtatidze book seems to state that it came out in 1948. Its publication-date was 1944, and so the discrepancy needs an explanation. Towards the end of this paper I mentioned restrictions on sending old books abroad, specifying that still in Russia it is illegal to send a publication that is older than 50 years without special permission. However, while I was in the USSR during at least my first post-graduate term, the ban applied to the export of items published before 1945. So, I used to alter the dates where I could, hoping to fool any official who might cast just a casual eye over such works. I also removed 1st pages from some such books, bringing them home separately. When I first left Georgia in 1976 by train to Istanbul, I asked my wife to sew a couple of extra pockets inside my blazer so that I could hide some old items in the hope that clothing would not be searched at the Leninakan border. However, the two volumes of Simon Qaukhchishvili's 'Works of Ioane Petritsi' were too big to fit in these additional pockets, which meant they had to travel in a suitcase. At the border two Armenian guards boarded the train. I was asked to stand in the corridor with the older one, while the younger one went through my luggage. He found these volumes and brought them out to shew to his colleague. Luckily for me the older one knew some Georgian; he took a look and said: "They are not political. Let him keep them." One may readily imagine my relief.

[12] Rustaveli 1937 and 1975, based on Rustaveli 1712.

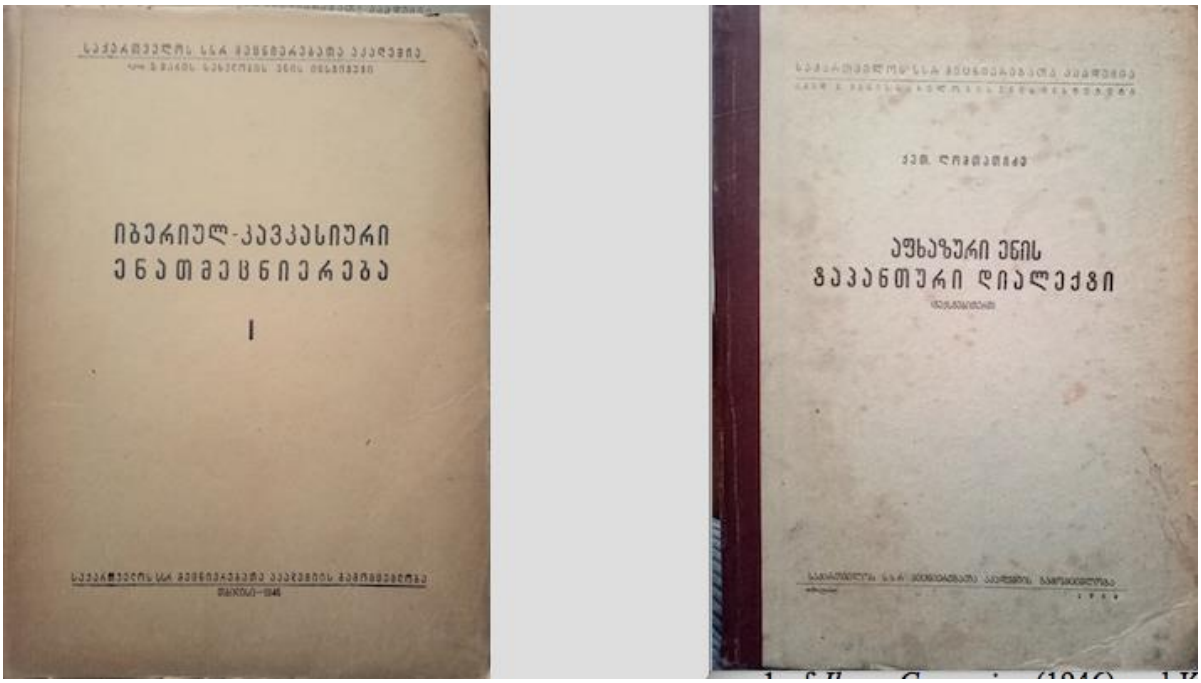

Fig. 1: Two old and rare books found in a Tbilisi second-hand bookshop within two months of each other (November 1979 – January 1980): Ibero-Caucasian Linguistics (vol. 1, 1946, print-run 500), and Ketevan Lomtatidze's Tapanta Dialect of the Abkhaz Language with Texts (1944 [sic!], print-run 150)

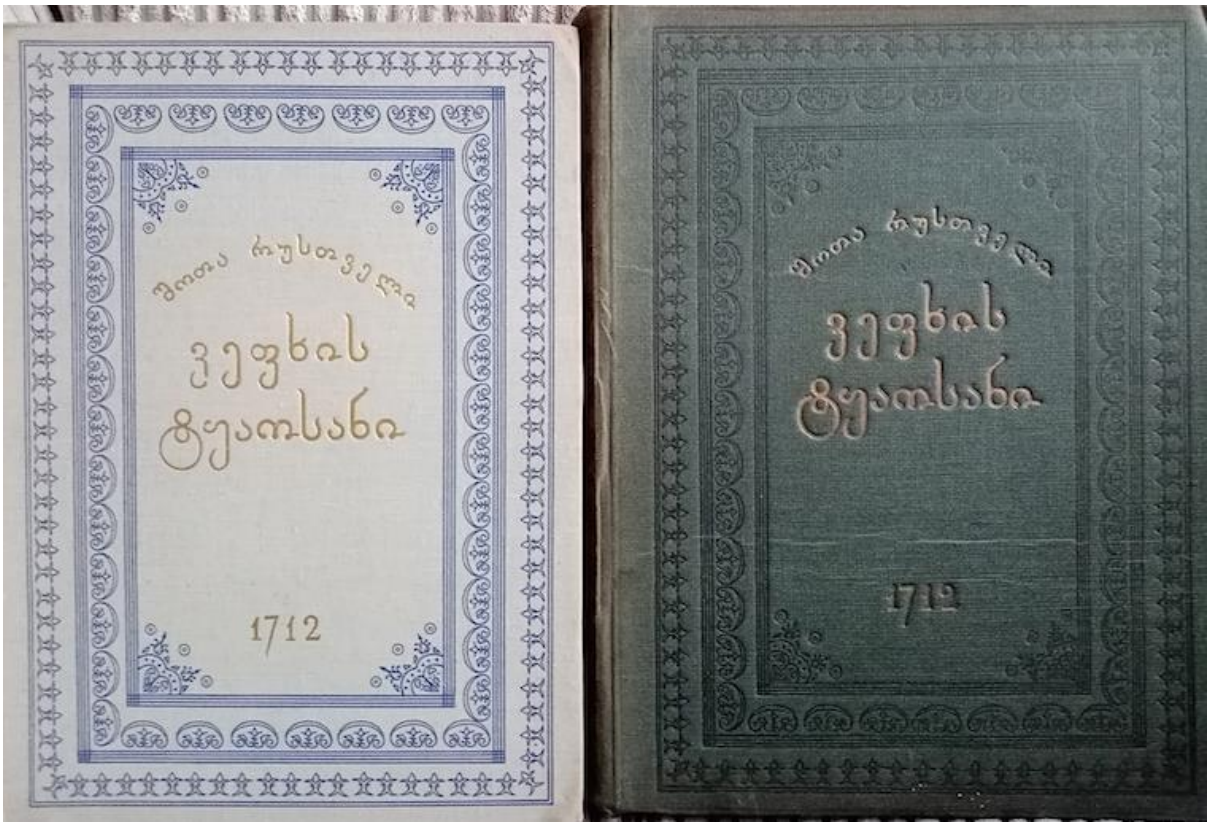

Fig. 2: Facsimile-reprints of the first printed book in Georgian dating to 1712, namely Shota Rust(a)veli's 'Man in the Panther-skin'. The one on the left was published in 1975 and was bought in Tbilisi at the end of that year. On the right is the cover of the 1937 edition. Both versions start with an Introduction by the editor Akaki Shanidze. In 1937 this was dated to 12 July and runs to two pages, whereas in 1975 the date is 12 November and consists of a single page (minus any reference to two sons of Georgia whose mention was obligatory in 1937).

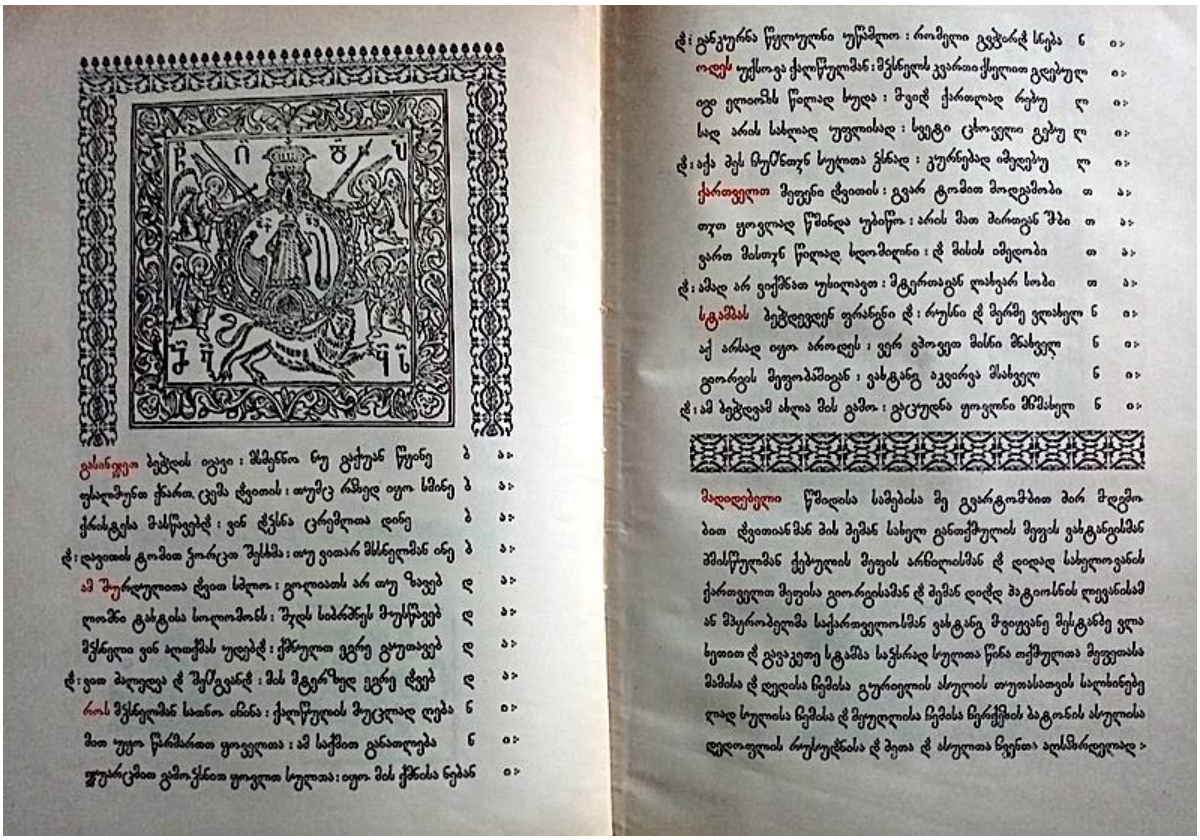

Fig. 3: Two pages illustrating the beauty of the production.

Fig. 4: Cover of the 1983 multi-lingual de-luxe edition of the oldest work of Georgian literature, Iakob Tsurtaveli's Martyrdom of Shushanik (476–483), with repoussée metalwork applied to the binding's front, back and spine.

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ქართველურ/კავკასიურ ენათა შესწავლა საბჭოთა პერიოდში და დღეს

ჯორჯ ჰიუიტი (ლონდონი)

როზმარი სალივანის მიერ 2015 წელს გამოცემულ წიგნში „სტალინის ქალიშვილი: სვეტლანა ალილუევას უჩვეულო და მჩქეფარე ცხოვრება“, რომელშიც განული საუკუნის 70-იან წლებში საბჭოთა კავშირში არსებული ზოგადი სიტუაციაა აღწერილი, ასეა შეფასებული საბჭოთა მოქალაქეების უცხოელებთან ურთიერთობის კონტროლის მექანიზმი და შესაძლო შედეგები: „1970-იანი წლების შუა პერიოდში საბჭოთა კავშირის მოქალაქეებს პრაქტიკულად არ ჰქონდათ ზედამხედველობის გარეშე მოგზაურობის უფლება აღმოსავლეთის ბლოკის ფარგლებს გარეთ. სსრკ-ს ფარგლებშიც უცხოელებთან ნებისმიერი კონტაქტი იმ დროს ქვეყნის ღალატად ითვლებოდა“.

ვინაიდან ჩემი აკადემიური ინტერესებიდან გამომდინარე, სწორედ ამ პერიოდში მომიწია საქართველოში ცხოვრება და სწავლა, მინდა გაგიზიაროთ ჩემი, როგორც

უცხოელის, „სასიამოვნო“ და „ასატანი“ გამოცდილება ამ პერსპექტივიდან. მინდა გიამბოთ, თუ როგორ გავატარე თბილისში ასპირანტურაში სწავლის პერიოდი 1975–76 სასწავლო წელს, და შევადარო იგი ჩემი ამერიკელი წინამორბედების – დი ენ ჰოლისკისა და ალისა ჰარისის – გამოცდილებას, რომლებიც თბილისში ჩემზე ერთი წლით ადრე იმყოფებოდნენ იმავე სტატუსით. ასპირანტურის დამთავრების შემდეგ, 1979–80 წლებში, მე კიდევ ერთხელ მომეცა საშუალება სასწავლო წელი თბილისში გამეტარებინა. და ბოლოს, 1987 წელს 5 თვე დავყავი თბილისში, როგორც თბილისის სახელმწიფო უნივერსიტეტის ლექტორმა (ამ დროს შვებულებაში ვიყავი ჰალის უნივერსიტეტიდან). ამდენად, მე, როგორც უცხოელს, თბილისში ცხოვრებისა და სწავლის ორმაგი გამოცდილება დამიგროვდა: როგორც ასპირანტს და როგორც ლექტორს.

მინდა ორივე პერსპექტივიდან დანახული და განცდილი ჩემი შთაბეჭდილებები გაგიზიაროთ და მოგითხროთ საბჭოთა პერიოდში არსებული იმ პროცედურებისა და, შესაბამისად, იმ სირთულეების შესახებ, რომელთა მომსწრეც თავად ვიყავი.

ამჯერად მე მხოლოდ რამდენიმე პროცედურაზე გავამახვილებ ყურადღებას:

1. საქართველოში ხანგრძლივი პერიოდით ცხოვრების უფლების მოპოვება საბჭოთა პერიოდში (განსაკუთრებით 1970-80-იან წლებში) სტუდენტებისთვის, ასპირანტებისა და ლექტორებისთვის;
2. შეთანხმების მიღწევა სწავლის უფლებისა და დაფინანსების მისაღებად ამა თუ იმ ენის შესასწავლად;
3. მუშაობა ისეთ სიტუაციაში, როდესაც აუცილებელი ან სასურველი ლიტერატურის – წიგნების, ჟურნალების ან/და ჩანაწერების – მოპოვება არ იყო ადვილი, შეძენაზე რომ აღარაფერი ვთქვათ;
4. ქვეყნის ფარგლებში კვლევითი ან ტურისტული მიზნით გადაადგილების ორგანიზების სირთულეები;
5. შეძენილი სისტემური ცოდნის პრაქტიკულად გამოყენების შესაძლებლობები.

და ბოლოს მოკლედ ვისაუბრებ პოსტსაბჭოთა პერიოდთან და თანამედროვე ტექნოლოგიებთან ჩემს „უცნაურ“ ურთიერთობებზე.