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MIKHAKO TSERETELI - PATRIARCH OF URARTOLOGY, TRANSLATOR (1878-1965)***Tamaz Putkaradze***

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In the period between the First and Second World Wars, the outflow of intellectual resources from Georgia abroad was mainly due to the Bolshevik coup and the Soviet annexation. Among the emigrants was the great Georgian scientist, Patriarch of Urartology Mikhako Tsereteli. Demonstrating his contribution to science and his merits in translation is the main task of our research.

The methodological basis of the research is the universal scientific principles of objectivity, comprehensiveness and systematics, historical-comparative and historical-typological methods.

From the factual materials presented in the article, it is clear that M. Tsereteli made a contribution to the development of domestic and world science, translation activities. Thanks to his work, M. Tsereteli made a great contribution to the processes of mutual enrichment of culture and knowledge, acquaintance with intellectual tendencies, and raising awareness about Georgia. It was he who deciphered the Assyrian-Urartian bilingualism of Kelashin and laid the foundation for the formation of "Urartology" as a new scientific direction.

Keywords:

Bilingua, Stele, Science, Culture, Emigration, "Gilgamesh", "The Knight in the Tiger's Skin"

MIKHAKO ЦЕРЕТЕЛИ – ПАТРИАРХ УРАРТОЛОГІЇ, ПЕРЕКЛАДАЧ (1878-1965)***Tamaz Putkaradze***

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У статті досліджено період між Першою та Другою світовими війнами, коли відбувався масовий відтік інтелектуальних ресурсів з Грузії за кордон. З'ясовано, що він відбувався переважно через більшовицький переворот та радянську анексію. Встановлено, що серед емігрантів був великий грузинський учений, сходознавець, патріарх урартології Міхако Церетелі. Головним завданням дослідження поставлено показати внесок вченого в науку та заслуги у перекладі. Методологічною основою дослідження стали універсальні наукові принципи об'єктивності, комплексності та системності, історико-порівняльний та історико-типологічний методи.

З фактичних матеріалів, викладених у статті, видно, що

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М. Церетелі мав високий рівень освіти, науковий ступінь і займався політичною, а також дослідницькою та перекладацькою діяльністю. Науковець М. Церетелі був одним із перших професорів новоствореного Тбіліського державного університету, завідувачем кафедри асирології та історії Стародавнього Сходу університетів Мюнхена, Брюсселя, Берліна. Завдяки своїй творчості, М. Церетелі сприяв взаємозбагаченню культури і знань, ознайомленню з інтелектуальними тенденціями, підвищенню обізнаності світової громадськості про Грузію. Саме М. Церетелі розшифрував ассирійсько-урартську двомовність Келашина та заклав основу для формування «урартології» як нового напрямку в науці. Особливу увагу вчений приділяв питанням клинописних написів та ієрогліфів, опублікував цикл статей з історії Урарту.

Встановлено, що М. Церетелі був перекладачем на німецьку мову літературних пам'яток «Лицар в тигровій шкурі», «Книги мудрості і брехні» й ін. Крім того, М. Церетелі активно займався політичною діяльністю, підтримкою антибільшовицького руху в Грузії, створив «Комітет незалежності Грузії».

Ключові слова: М. Церетелі, Грузія, урартологія, клинопис, переклад, політична діяльність

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The great Georgian scientist, historian, publicist, translator, world-renowned orientalist, Patriarch of Urartology Mikhako Tsereteli has established a worthy place in the constellation of world-renowned scientists. He was born in 1878, December 3, in the village of Tskhrukveti, Sachkhere district. He studied at the University of Paris, after which he became involved in politics, but soon returned to science (in parallel with politics) and went to London to deepen his knowledge. It was there that he began his study of Assyrology, graduated from the University of Heidelberg and got his doctor's degree in 1914. Prior to that, he published his fundamental work "Sumerian and Georgian", which was later published in English and French¹.

Before emigration, he was involved in politics during the period of independent Georgia. M. Tsereteli heads diplomatic missions in Germany and the Scandinavian countries. In 1921 after the Bolshevik annexation, he went abroad and took up scientific work.

¹ Mikhako Tsereteli. URL: <https://www.litinstituti.ge/emigrant/mixakowereteli.html>

The merit of Tsereteli to national and world science is great. He was one of the first professors of the newly created Tbilisi State University, head of the Department of Assyrology and History of the Ancient East at the universities of Munich, Brussels, Berlin (1944-1965) (Georgian writing of emigrants).²



Photo 1. M. Tsreteli (1915).
National Library of the Parliament of Georgia

His monograph “Land of the Hittites”³ was highly appreciated in foreign scientific circles, but the monograph “Recently Discovered Chaldean Inscriptions” published in German in 1929, brought him the greatest recognition.

The scientist paid special attention to the issues of cuneiform inscriptions and hieroglyphs, published a series of articles on the history of Urartu. Reaches significant scientific success. He was the first in 1933 to decipher the Assyrian-Urartian bilingualism of

² Ibidem.

³ Samsonia N. Mikhako Tsereteli // Chemi samkaro (Tbilisi). 2014. № 6. P. 56-58.

Kelashin, laying the foundation for the science of urartology and receiving the name of the patriarch of urartology⁴.

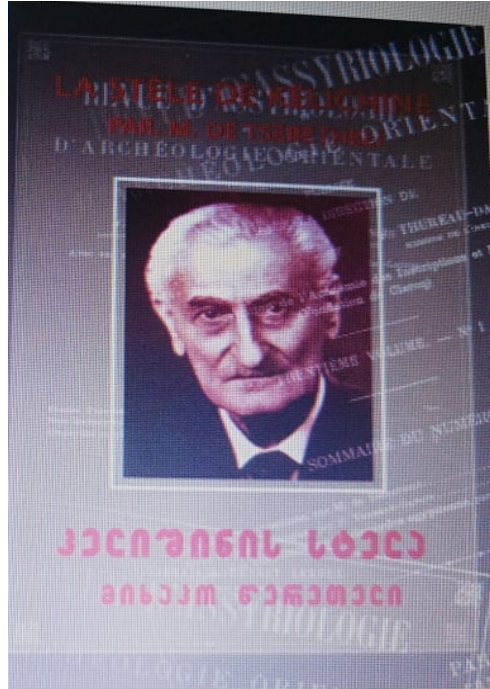


Photo 2. Kelashin Stele. Monograph
(T. Putkaradze, May 16, 2012)

M. Tsereteli also made a lot of efforts to study the Sumerian language. He penned the famous scientific work “Sumerian and Georgian” (1912), which was later published in English and French.

In 2013, his work “Kelashin Stele” was published at Tbilisi State University, edited by Levan Gordesiani. The French translation of the work belongs to Ekaterina Gamkrelidze⁵. An interesting fact is that in 2014, four manuscripts by M. Tsereteli were discovered in the National Library of Georgia (“Sumerian–Akkadian Dictionary” (previously considered lost), “Grammar of the Georgian Language” in French, a French manuscript of Akkadian (Assyrian) grammar and “Kelashin Stele” – cuneiform text.

The stele of Kelashin (Kela-shin, in Kurdish – blue stone) dates back to the 9th century BC. A stele with a Urartian–Assyrian bilingual cuneiform inscription was found on the territory of modern Iraq, in Kelashin. Many European scientists worked on it, but

⁴ Ibid. P. 56–60.

⁵ Samsonia N., Sharashidze J. Kelishinis stela. Aghmosavletmcodneoba // TSU oriental studies Institute of the Faculty of Humanitarian Sciences. Tbilisi. 2014. P. 359–366.

Mikhako Tsereteli had the honor to decipher and translate. The stele describes the conquest of the city of Musasir (Ardin) by the king of Urartu Ispuin. His method of decoding-comprehension of the text and approach became key for scientists working on these problems. While reading the text, he also identified and clarified the grammatical problems of the Urartian language. In 1939-1959, as a result of 20 years of tireless work, M. Tsereteli was able to completely decipher and translate cuneiform texts, which allowed him to publish a corpus of Urartian texts⁶.



Photo 3. M. Tsereteli's Unknown Manuscripts
(viewed on May 25, 2021).

Fruitful work, high qualifications and professionalism of M. Tsereteli brought him the name of the patriarch of urartology in world science. Scholar Nino Samsonia compares the successes of M. Tsereteli with the scientific achievements of François Champollion, the founder of Egyptology, who also deciphered the inscription on the Rosetta stone well known in science⁷.

It was extremely painful for the government of the Soviet political system to read and decipher ancient Urartian texts by a Georgian émigré scholar. Indeed, these sources contained important information about Georgia, in particular about the ancient state or the Georgian tribes on the verge of statehood, as well as ethnic and territorial issues. The persecution of M. Tsereteli began in order to preserve his world achievements, recognition, research unknown to the scientific circles of the Empire and Georgia. He was cursed as an emigre representative of the Menshevik government and emphasized his political orientation (although everyone knew that he was politically correct, because his whole life was spent on the implementation of the idea of Georgia's independence).

⁶ Samsonia N. Op. cit. P. 65.

⁷ Ibidem.



Photo 4. Image of Kelishin Stele (Early 20th century)
(URL: https://wikichi.ru/wiki/Kelashin_Stele)

M. Tsereteli made a great contribution to the study of the Urartian language. He dwelled on the grammar of the Urartian language, the peculiarities of verbal peculiarities⁸, urartological research in Georgia and rejected the theory of Janashvili (see M. Janashvili, 1906) about the connection of the Urartian language with the Old Georgian. His scientific research in the field of urartology also brought him worldwide recognition. His work “On the new Chaldean inscription of the king of Urartu Sardur. An attempt to decipher the Chaldean language” received wide recognition in the scientific community. A modest researcher calls his translation an attempt in this area, although the translation-transcript was carried out by a scientist at a high professional level, which was even mentioned in scientific circles. It was he who established the ergative construction of the Urartian language. In general, Assyrology studies Urartian along with Assyrian, Hittite, Mitannian, Babylonian and other languages. This area was one of the important directions in the newly opened Tbilisi State University – with a corresponding department headed by M. Tsereteli⁹.

His merit in the field of translation is special. His name is associated with the translation of the Epic of Gilgamesh from the cuneiform plates (in Georgian) kept in the British Museum in 1913-1916.

⁸ Akhalkatsi N. Turqul-qartuli urtiertobebi-istoria da tanamedroevoba. Saertashoriso samecienro semianris masalebi. Akhaltsikhe, 2016. P. 43-65.

⁹ Samsonia N. Op. cit. P. 64.

This translation was imbued with a deep knowledge of the heritage of the most important literary monument – “The Knight in the Tiger’s Skin”. M. Tsereteli is one of the three leaders not only among the translators of this literary monument, but also among the decoders. British scientists considered M. Tsereteli as a pioneer in the translation of “Gilgameshian”¹⁰. This translation was published in Constantinople in 1924, although it was banned for a long time in Georgia, but in 2010, Mihako Tsereteli’s “Gilgameshian” was published at Tbilisi State University. With this translation, the scientist took a worthy place in world science. Later, in 1963, “Gilgameshian” was translated into Georgian by Zurab Kiknadze.

It should be noted that “The Epic of Gilgamesh” has been translated into almost all European languages since the 1950s. It was translated into Russian in 1963 by I. Dyakonov. The epic has also been translated into several oriental languages.

The translation of “The Knight in the Tiger Skin” into German is associated with the name of Mikhako Tsereteli. He woked on this poem as a child and then put a lot of effort into research. He again adapted the text of the poem and translated it prosaically into German. This was a long-time dream of a scientist. “I hope to see in my life my "The Knight in the Tiger’s Skin", printed in German translation. This will be a great gift to the genius poet dedicated to his anniversary by the Georgian, in whose house the "The Knight in the Tiger’s Skin" was known by heart by man and woman who could not read and write well, but would tell it by heart to entertain their guests,” he wrote Tsereteli¹¹.

As already mentioned, M. Tsereteli translated “The Night in the Tiger’s Skin” into full prose and published it in Berlin¹², and then it was published in Paris, edited by Nino Salia (1975). In general, the translation of the “The Night in the Tiger’s Skin” and its distribution outside Georgia dates back to the 19th century. This was an expression of the manifestation by the Georgian society of the greatest phenomenon of its culture and national identity in the European space. This poem was published 215 times from 1712 to the 1980s. 61 of them are in Georgian, the rest are in foreign languages. Among them is the above-mentioned translation of M. Tsereteli¹³.

Among Tsereteli’s translations, the German and French translations of Sulkhan-Saba Orbeliani’s “Sibrdzne Sitsruisa” (A Book of Wisdom and Lies) , made by him in emigration, are especially important. The German translation of “Sibrdzne Sitsruisa” (A Book of Wisdom and Lies) was published in Germany (Berlin) in 1933. Also in the printing house of the emigrant Archil Metreveli. It was discovered in the 1980s and brought to Georgia by Professor G. Sharadze. This book was kept in Tsereteli’s personal archive. After the creation of the Museum of Georgian Emigration at TSU in 1994, this translation was transferred to the museum along with other publications.

¹⁰ Samsonia N. M. Tsereteli. URL: <https://www.gfsis.org/files/my-world/6/tsereteli.pdf>

¹¹ Ibidem.

¹² Chachanidze V. Vepkhistaosani msolfios khalkhta enebze. Tbilisi, 1980. P. 81.

¹³ Sanikidze S. Shota Rustavelis “Vepkhistaosnis” shinaarsobrivi planis analizi targmantan mimartebashi (based on Georgian, English and Russian materials), Ph.D. Thesis. Tbilisi, 2019. P. 36.

In 2017, the German translation of “Sibrdzne Sitsruisa” (A Book of Wisdom and Lies) by M. Tsereteli was published (editors-publishers: Jemal Sharashenidze, Nino Samsonia, Rusudan Kobakhidze), which was presented on May 28 of the same year (presentation of the German translation of the book)¹⁴. Tsereteli’s translation was first published in Georgia. It was presented along with other translations and works of M. Tsereteli at the 19th Tbilisi Book Festival and the Frankfurt International Film Festival.

In parallel with his scientific activities, he maintains close ties with Georgia, fights for the liberation of the Motherland from the Bolshevik yoke. The First World War gave M. Tsereteli hopes for the liberation of the Motherland. He is trying to use the situation created by the war in favor of Georgia. Therefore, in 1914 he joined the Ottoman Empire. He formed the “Committee for the Independence of Georgia” and conducted active negotiations with Germany and Turkey. He twice managed to secretly arrive in Georgia on a submarine and bring weapons¹⁵. However, at that time, his wishes were not destined to come true.

The personal life of the great scientist was also difficult. The only child of the exiled emigrant, Otar, died during the World War II (during the war he burned down in a tank)¹⁶. There was Otar’s wife, with whom he was not officially married and from whom a grandson was born, but due to the tragic death of his father, the child was registered in the mother’s surname, which deprived the grandfather of any rights to his grandson. This is evidenced by the letters written by M. Tsereteli to his wife Mariam Vakhvakhishvili on May 25, 1959. The great scientist who missed his homeland¹⁷ lived years of his life alone. Full with nostalgia and boundless sadness, the scientist asks about the state of his own, father’s hut and walnut trees near his house in his native village in a letter written on February 24, 1960 to his nephew¹⁸.

M. Tsereteli died on March 2, 1965 in a Munich hospital. According to the will, his body was cremated in the crematorium, and the dust was taken to the Georgian cemetery in Paris. His last wish was to take the urn to his native village.

M. Tsereteli left a rich archive, which, according to his will, was given to Nino and Kalistrat Sali.

M. Tsereteli was a great scientist, orientalist of world significance, translator, author of world famous works published in French, German, English, Italian and Georgian, who was called and persecuted as fascists in his homeland¹⁹. He referred to as the patriarch of urartology in foreign scientific circles. Throughout his adult life, he was engaged in Georgian work, served Georgian science and informed the world about the history, culture, rich material and spiritual heritage of his country.

¹⁴ M. Tsereteli. URL: <http://online.tsu.edu.ge/ge/news/1333/?P=15>

¹⁵ Samsonia N. M. Tsereteli. URL: <https://www.gfsis.org/files/my-world/6/tsereteli.pdf>

¹⁶ Ibidem.

¹⁷ Samsonia N. Mikhako Tsereteli...

¹⁸ Ibidem.

¹⁹ Ibid. P. 65.



Photo 5. M. Tsereteli's will (T. Putkaradze, May 16, 2012)

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