History

New Editions of “Kartlis Tskhovreba”

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ABSTRACT. In 2008 the scholarly community received a new publication of “Kartlis Tskhovreba” – History of Georgia (literally “Life of Kartli”) – in the Georgian language and its full Russian translation, done for the first time. The Chief Editor of both publications is Academician Roin Metreveli.

A brilliant monument of the Georgian historical literature – the collection of the historical works “Kartlis Tskhovreba” is the only continuous source of writing, and, at the same time, is official history of the country.

The monument is significant for the fact that, besides the history of Georgia and the Georgians, it contains evidence on the past of different countries and peoples (Azerbaijanians, Armenians, Ossetians, Lezghins and other nations of Dagestan, Greeks, Romans, Persians, Arabs, Byzantines, Turks, Mongols and others).

Key words: History of Georgia, “Kartlis Tskhovreba”.

The History of Georgia and Georgians takes a significant place in the context of world history. Since ancient times human society, which passed a long way of cultural and historic evolution, existed on the territory of Georgia. The results of historical investigations (archaeological discoveries, ethnographic material) confirm that Georgia is the most ancient country of developed land farming and animal breeding in the world, where ploughing tools were used since the earliest times, the principle of wheel was known and the culture of vine was developed. The first states on the territory of Georgia appeared three thousand years ago and over the millennia Georgians created an original highly developed culture primarily occupying their place in world civilization.

Life, motion, very often unpredictable, makes the core of history. The process of creation of history is conditioned by the existence of man and humanity. History becomes the participator of this creative process.

We aim to propose to the scholarly community the most important narrative monument in its general, historical and source-studying context. Georgian civilization takes its niche in the general civilization process, that is why “Kartlis Tskhovreba”, being a high level monument refers to sources of primary importance.

Georgian history is characterized, on the one hand, by different types of cruel wars, by utmost strain of physical and moral strength, deep dramatism, and, on the other, by significant success, political and territorial unification of the country in certain periods, cities and urban life development, science, education and culture. The life of Georgian ancestors, their fight, labor and creative work were reflected in folklore (poetry, stories, legends, etc.). The story of Amirani, myth about the Argonauts, tales about the foundation of Tbilisi, and other stories passed from one generation to another.

Monuments of material culture such as churches, monasteries, castles, ruins of palaces, settlements, etc. are evidence of the Georgian past; however, complete reconstruction of the country’s history is possible mainly by means of written sources.

The first historical manuscripts in the Georgian language date from the 5th c. AD. The collection of historical works “Kartlis Tskhovreba” represents the only compiled written source of the history of Georgia and

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official history of the country. It is a brilliant monument of Georgian historical writings.

“The Bible”, “The Knight in the Panther’s Skin” and “Kartlis Tskhovreba” since the old times were considered to be “fair” and “holy” books forming the necessary part of the trousseau of a Georgian bride.

In “Kartlis Tskhovreba” historical works of different authors are set in chronological order, enabling to create a single whole history of Georgia. The monument is significant for the fact that, besides the history of Georgia and the Georgians, it contains evidence on the past of different countries and peoples (Azerbaijanians, Armenians, Ossetians, Lezghins and other nations of Dagestan, Greeks, Romans, Persians, Arabs, Byzantines, Turks, Mongols and others).

A great contribution to the study of “Kartlis Tskhovreba” was made by the king of Kartli Vakhtang VI (1675-1737), who created a special group (commission) of “learned men”. They carried out significant work on the establishment and continuation of the texts of the monument. The manuscripts of “Kartlis Tskhovreba” were copied many times (mainly the MSS of Vakhtang’s edition) due to which we have about twenty manuscripts.

In 1849 the Russian Academy of Sciences published “Kartlis Tskhovreba”, prepared on the basis of MSS of post-Vakhtang period by the French Orientalist and Georgian Academician M. Brosset. The scholar himself translated the text into the French language and published it. He made this source on the history of Georgia practically accessible to the world community. Brosset carried out significant work on the establishment and continuation of the texts of the monument. The manuscripts of “Kartlis Tskhovreba” were copied many times (mainly the MSS of Vakhtang’s edition) due to which we have about twenty manuscripts.

In 1884 the eminent Georgian historian D. Bakradze revealed the copy of the MS assigned for Queen Mariam (wife of the King of Kartli Rostom (1633-1648)), referring to the 17th c. The manuscript is preserved in the National Centre of Manuscripts (Q-795).

The Queen Mariam MS was added to the “fount of treasure”, which, as assumed by J.P. Mahé and Ts. Kurtiskidze, must have been translated from the Arabic: “History of the Kings of the Georgians” by Leonti Mroveli, “The Life of King Vakhtang Gorgasali” by Juansher, “Chronicle of Kartli”, “History of the King of Kings David”, “Chronicle” by Sumbat Davitisdze (short history of the Bagratids, 5-6th cc.), manuscript of the first historian of Queen Tamar “Histories and Eulogies of the Sovereigns” and the work of an unknown chronicler titled “Chronicle of a Hundred Years”.

In 1923 I. Javakhishvili discovered one more manuscript, so-called Chalashvili’s MS. There are two parts in it: the earlier one was rewritten at the beginning of the 17th c.; the missing parts (at the beginning and at the end) were written in 1731 by the hand of Eraj Chalashvili, who supplemented the text according to the MS of Vakhtang’s Edition. Now the manuscript is preserved at the National Centre of Manuscripts (Q-207).

The following manuscripts are included in the MS of Eraj Chalashvili: the manuscripts of Leonti Mroveli and Juansher, “Chronicle of Kartli”, History of David the Builder, the second history of Queen Tamar (different from the “Histories and Eulogies of the Sovereigns”).

I. Javakhishvili considered Basili Ezosmodzghvari (Lord Steward of the King’s court) to be the author of the second history of Tamar, but the story itself was called “History of the Queen of Queens Tamar”. At the end of the manuscript (new part) the continuation of “Kartlis Tskhovreba” is presented (14-18th cc.) composed by the “learned men” of Vakhtang VI.

In 1942 S. Qaukhchishvili studied the so-called Machabeli MS, copied by Giorgi Machabeli in 1736. The original was the MS of “Kartlis Tskhovreba” belonging to King Archil, as the copyist stated. It was established that the missing parts of the original (at the beginning and at the end) were taken by him (Machabeli) from Chalashvili’s MS. Today the manuscript is preserved at the National Centre of Manuscripts (H-2135).

“History of King Vakhtang Gorgasali”, “Martyrdom of Saint Archil”, “Chronicle of Kartli”, History of David the Builder, “Histories and Eulogies of the Sovereigns”, “Chronicle of a Hundred Years”. The MS ends with “Kartlis Tskhovreba” (the 14th-15th cc.).

In 1959 Akaki Klimiaishvili discovered a MS of “Kartlis Tskhovreba” in the family of Olga Machavariani, in Uper Imereti. The MS was copied in 1697. The date was indicated in the epilogue of the copyist. Right here he mentioned the original of the copied MS. The manuscript is preserved in the Svetitskhoveli Cathedral in Mtskheta. Conceivably, it is the same manuscript mentioned in the Mtskheta Charter in 1546. In the epilogue the name of the customer of the manuscript – Nikoloz Samebeli, Diocesan of Sameba (Trinity church near Ujarma village, Kakheti) is mentioned. The MS is preserved at the National Centre of Manuscripts (Q-1219).


The above five MSS of “Kartlis Tskhovreba” contain the writings of an “ancient cycle”. As was noted, by the initiative of Vakhtang VI, the group of “learned men”, based on different MSS, edited and supplemented “Kartlis Tskhovreba”, and they wrote its continuation – “New Kartlis Tskhovreba”. Besides this work, into the “new cycle” of “Kartlis Tskhovreba” were entered the writings by Vakhushshi Bagrati (S. Qukhchishvili published this work in the 4th volume of “Kartlis Tskhovreba”), Sekhnia Chkheidze, Papuna Orbeliani, Oman Kherkheulidze (together with the work of Vakhushshi), published by David Chubinashvili in Petersburg, in 1854 as the second book of “Kartlis Tskhovreba”.

In its original form “Kartlis Tskhovreba” was composed in the 11th-12th cc. Evidently, political integration of the State, its economical and cultural development demanded a general and complete description of the past of Georgia. The collection aimed not only at describing the history of the State, but at proving ideologically the political integration of Georgia and the reign of the Bagrationi dynasty. Before that time notes on chronicles of Georgia were made from time to time, as Leonti Mroveli mentioned in his work “Martyrdom of Saint Archil”.

I. Javakhishvili demonstrated that the chronicles on the history of Georgia since ancient times up to the 8th c. were collected in “Kartlis Tskhovreba”. Later, during the following centuries the works on the history of the 8th-12th cc. and then the 13th-14th cc. were added, i.e.: “History of the Kings and Patriarchs of the Georgians” and “The Conversion of Kartli by Saint Nino” by Leonti Mroveli, “History of King Vakhtang Gorgasali” by Juansher, “Chronicle of a Hundred Years”. “Martyrdom of Saint Archil” by Leonti Mroveli, “Chronicle of Kartli”, “History of the King of Kings David”, “History of the Bagratids” by Sundat Davitsidze, History of the Five Reigns (Life of King Demetre, Life of King Giorgi, Life of Queen Tamar the Great, Life of King Giorgi, the son of Tamar), the work of the first historian of Queen Tamar “Histories and Eulogies of the Sovereigns”, the work of Basili Ezosmodzghvari “History of the Queen of Queens Tamar”, “Chronicle of a Hundred Years” (the title is tentative). The last work ends with the accession of Giorgi Brtsqinvale (“The Brilliant”) (the beginning of the 14th c.). The chronicler describes the first steps of the king, but what was in future “the tongue is unable to tell so wonderful and awesome”. With this the narration ends; what was this “wonderful and awesome” remains a riddle. The so-called “ancient cycle” of “Kartlis Tskhovreba” ends with the “Chronicle of a Hundred Years”.

Perhaps, some of the manuscripts of “Kartlis Tskhovreba” have been lost, and there was no chance to continue the work started. However, some notes about events of that epoch exist. Thus, there is no joint history of the 14th-17th cc. The new cycle of “Kartlis Tskhovreba”, as we have already mentioned, was created by “learned men” of Vakhtang VI commission, who collected various historical materials and wrote the history of the 14th-17th cc. The new “Kartlis Tskhovreba” took 20 years to compile. The MSS of Vakhtang VI’s times (Rumyantsev, Teymurazov, Janashvili, Skhvitori) give evidence on the thorough work done by the “learned men”. It should be noted that “Kartlis Tskhovreba” attracted the attention of the Georgian society of that time. New customers and copyists appeared. Vakhushshi Bagrati (S. Qukhchishvili published this work in the 4th volume of “Kartlis Tskhovreba”), Sekhnia Chkheidze, Papuna Orbeliani, Oman Kherkheulidze (together with the work of Vakhushshi), published by David Chubinashvili in Petersburg, in 1854 as the second book of “Kartlis Tskhovreba”.

The “learned men” used various sources for the creation of the “New Kartlis Tskhovreba”. They expressed regret over the fact that the history of Georgia was “not written” for some definite period. Therefore they had to borrow the material from “ancient books”, history of Persians and Armenians, chronicles and charters, stories of eyewitnesses of the events, which is evidenced in the Introduction to the “New Kartlis Tskhovreba”.

Thus, Vakhtang VI and the commission of “learned men” created by him made a significant contribution...
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In 1955-59 Acad. S.Qaukhchishvili, considering all critical notes concerning all the manuscripts of that time, published the text of “Kartlis Tskhovreba”. It played a great role in the sphere of investigation of Georgian history in general, also textological and source study, combining the results of colossal work fulfilled by I.Javakhishvili and other Georgian scholars. Over the last 50 years “Kartlis Tskhovreba” has been at the centre of attention of scholars as the most important source of the history of Georgia. Many special investigations have been published in Georgia and outside her boundaries. Some works included in the monument before the second half of the 12th c. have been translated into foreign languages. “Kartlis Tskhovreba” was translated into the Old Armenian language (in 1953 Ilia Abuladze published the translation with commentaries); E. Taqaishvili, V. Akhvlediani, G.Tsulaia, M. Lordkipanidze, K. Kekelidze, V. Dondua, M. Shanidze translated some works into Russian; M. Brosset – into French, G. Pitsch – into German, K. Vivian and R. Thomson – into English.

In 1959 the manuscript of the so-called “ancient cycle” done in “nuskhuri” (ancient Georgian script) dated to 1697 was discovered. This fact and scholarly interest in “Kartlis Tskhovreba” called for a new publication of a critical text of this unique monument. The Commission of the Sources of the History of Georgia, Georgian Academy of Sciences, started this work at the end of the last century. A group of historians and philologists of K. Kekelidze Institute of Manuscripts, I. Javakhishvili Institute of History and Ethnology, and I. Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University took part in textological and critical investigation of the text of “Kartlis Tskhovreba”.

The selection of the MSS for publication of the text of “Kartlis Tskhovreba” in different publications is not similar, depending on the aim of the publishers (also on the availability of material). The publication of M. Brosset and the monumental two-volume publication of S. Qaukhchishvili (1955-1959) are based on several publications of MSS well-known by the time. Publications of separate MSS made by E. Taqaishvili in 1906 (the MS of Queen Mariam) and S. Qaukhchishvili in 1942 (the MS of Queen Anna) aimed at introduction of the earlier, pre-Vakhtang edition texts into scientific use. The selection of the published MSS of different parts in various publications of “Kartlis Tskhovreba” is also not similar (I. Javakhishvili, K. Kekelidze, M. Lordkipanidze, M. Shanidze, Ts. Kurtsikidze, R. Kiknadze, G. Arakhamia). In the last publication the traditional principles as to the structure of text worked out by I. Javakhishvili and later used by S. Qaukhchishvili with some specifications based on recent investigations have been observed. The tentative titles “Chronicle of Kartli”, “History of the King of Kings David”, “History of the Bagratids” by Sumbat Davitisdze, “Histories and Eulogies of the Sovereigns”, “Chronicle of a Hundred Years” are being preserved.

Usually, successes of the described “stories” (“lives”) depend on the well-composed narration and interpretation of them by the chronicler. To achieve a better effect, he uses various tools, tries to convey the event realistically, in order to construct an interesting plot, cite evidence, and skilfully use ideological implication.

I. Javakhishvili highly appreciated the manuscripts included in “Kartlis Tskhovreba” and considered the “Chronicle of Kartli”, the world by the historian of David the Builder, “Histories and Eulogies of the Sovereigns”, “Life of the Queen of Queens Tamar” by Basili Ezosmodzghvari, works of the chronicles of times of Lasha-Giorgi and Sumbat Davitisdze, “Chronicle of a Hundred Years” of an unknown chronicler to be trustworthy. The scholar made critical notes as to the works of Leonti Mroveli and Juansher, though he assumed that their publication with corresponding commentaries was necessary.

Among the authors of “Kartlis Tskhovreba” the historian of David the Builder, highly enlightened person, connoisseur of Western and Eastern cultures, is the most trustworthy and competent. His work is distinguished for elegance of style and language, artistry and deep sincerity. Comparison of the chronology of the events with other sources confirms the trustworthiness of his works. All this allows considering the chronicle to be a primary historical source.

It should be noted that all the works included in “Kartlis Tskhovreba” are valuable and very important for the study of the history of the Caucasus.
„ჯიურიანი ბოლონები“ ახალი გამოცდილება
რ. მეთეველი

საქართველო, საქართველოს მეცნიერებათა ენათული აკადემია

2008 წლის საქართველოს მეცნიერებათა ენათული აკადემიის (საქართველოს ისტორიის ფუნდაციის თვალსაზრისით) განათლებით, „ჯიურიანი ბოლონები“ ახალი პუბლიკაცია გამოვიდა. ამ პუბლიკაციის გამოქვაბული იქნა უძველესი კრონოლოგიური გამოცდილება, რომლის ლიცერები აკადემიის ისტორიის უძველესი დიდი უნივერსიტეტი — „ჯიურიანი ბოლონები“ ახალი გამოცდილება, რომლითაც ევროპის ისტორიაში მდგომ არის საქართველოს ანტიკური ისტორიის სურათ. ის არის ერთ-ერთი პუბლიკაცია, რომელიც ახალი გამოცდილება უძველესი კრონოლოგიური გამოცდილებად არის ჩაწერილი.

ჯიურიანი საქართველოს კულტურის მეცნიერების სენატის პროექტით გამოქვა ახალი პუბლიკაცია, „ჯიურიანი ბოლონები“ — რომლითაც საქართველოს ისტორიის უძველესი გამოცდილება გამოქვა. ეს პუბლიკაცია საქართველოს ანტიკური ისტორიაში უძველესი კრონოლოგიური გამოცდილება არის, რომელიც ჯიურიანი ბოლონებით იყო წარმოადგენილი.

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Received June, 2009