

Nachrufe und Totentafel—

Konstantin Tsereteli (1921-2004)

A prominent representative of the Georgian school of Semitic studies, Doctor of Philological Sciences, Professor, Member of the Georgian Academy of Sciences, Konstantin Tsereteli was born into the family of a teacher in Tbilisi on 4 February 1921. Upon finishing secondary school in 1937 he enrolled at the Philology Faculty of Tbilisi State University, which he graduated from with honours in November 1941, majoring in Caucasian and Oriental languages. In 1941 he joined the postgraduate course at the Georgian Academy of Sciences, in the speciality “Semitics (Hebrew-Aramaic philology)”. He began to deliver a lecture course on Biblical Hebrew on 1 October 1944, at Tbilisi State University. In 1945 Tsereteli began to work at the Department of Near-Eastern languages of the Georgian Academy of Sciences Institute of Language (later of Linguistics). Research in Hebrew Studies largely dealt with Georgian-Hebrew contacts, namely, by juxtaposition of the Georgian Bible with the Hebrew original, this being of special importance for the study of Georgian language and literature. The foundation was laid here for the study of the speech of Assyrians residing in Georgia. In 1946 Konstantin Tsereteli defended his candidate's thesis in philological sciences, and in 1956 he defended his doctoral thesis in the same field.

In 1950 he was awarded the scholarly title of Assistant Professor and in 1959 that of Professor, specializing in Semitic Studies. Since the foundation of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Georgian Academy of Sciences (1960) he has directed its Semitic Department. In 1991, on K. Tsereteli's initiative, a chair of Hebrew-Aramaic Philology was set up at Tbilisi State University, which he has led since then.

In 1974 K. Tsereteli was elected Corresponding member of the Georgian Academy of Sciences, and in 1988 Member of the same Academy. In 1993 he was elected Member of the Presidium of the Georgian Academy of Sciences.

Tsereteli was a member of a number of academic councils. He was also engaged in public activity by participating in the work of various governmental and academic commissions and delegations.

He took an active part in the work of the Georgian Encyclopedia as a member of its Main Scientific Council. On the initiative and by Acad. K.

Tsereteli's effort, intensive teaching of Oriental Languages has been introduced in Georgian schools, conducted by graduates of the Faculty of Oriental Studies of Tbilisi State University. He was an acknowledged leader of Georgian Semitics and the President of the Association of Georgian Orientalists.

Living Aramaic dialects hold a special place in K. Tsereteli's scholarly work. It was precisely the key problems of Aramaic dialectology to which his Candidate's and Doctoral theses were devoted. In this respect mention should be made of his first monograph *Essay on Comparative Phonetics of the Modern Assyrian Dialects* (1958) (reviewed by Johannes Friedrich, OLZ 1961, p. 64) and his *Materials on Aramaic Dialectology*, vol. I (Tbilisi, 1965), in which the texts are supplied with a translation and notes. Along with these dialects, he has studied and published Aramaic dialects preserved on the territory of Syria and Iraq. These publications were based on the dialectological material gathered by the author during his scholarly missions abroad, carried out at various times. Tsereteli's basic work *Grammar of the Modern Assyrian Language* came out in 1968, at once claiming the attention of specialists. The structure of Modern Assyrian is presented in the book, with account of living Aramaic dialects. Interest in scholarly circles in the cited book was enhanced by the publication of a book of a similar character in German in the 1860s (Th. Nöldeke's *Grammatik der neusyrischen Sprache*), with no study of this type having come out since then. In 1964 Tsereteli's *The Modern Assyrian Language* was issued in Moscow, following in subsequent years by the publication of its English, German and Italian translations.

It is generally recognized that Tsereteli's works in Aramaic dialectology laid the foundation for extensive research into problems in this field of scholarship, serving as an impulse in world Oriental Studies. He is justly considered the father of Aramaic dialectology, as attested by the numerous reviews and pronouncements on his studies and their author. One can hardly find a work in this field in which Tsereteli's studies are not referred to.

Following the living Aramaic dialects, Tsereteli took up the study of classical Syriac. His work *The Syriac Language*, issued in 1970 in Moscow, ranks among Tsereteli's important studies. Notably enough, hitherto a work of this kind had not been published in Georgian or in Russian. *The Syriac Language* has turned into a handbook for Semitists.

Tsereteli's monograph *The Aramaic Language* (Tbilisi, 1982) deals with his historical grammar of Aramaic. Based on the latest achievements in Aramaic Studies, the author presents a description of the structure of Aramaic over the past three thousand years, beginning with the ancient epigraphic inscriptions to the present-day living dialects. Such generalized description of the grammatical structure of Aramaic, covering the entire recorded history of this language,

is a first attempt in Semitic Studies. The work was published in Georgian and Russian in Tbilisi, while its Italian translation came out in Turin (Italy), under the title *Grammatica generale dell'aramaico*.

Hebrew-Aramaic epigraphy has been the main object of Tsereteli's research over the past two decades. The significance of this field for the history of Georgian culture is invaluable. Suffice it to recall that the discovery of the Armazian epigraphic inscriptions in the late 1930s proved a major gain of Georgian archeology, laying the foundation for research into Georgia's Aramaic epigraphic monuments. Tsereteli devoted quite a few studies to the Aramaic inscriptions discovered in Georgia. Among these the Uplistsikhe inscriptions merits special attention, for it is the oldest epigraphic monument discovered on the territory of Georgia, dating from the 3rd (or 2nd) cent. B.C. In 1992 Tsereteli's highly noteworthy study, *Notes on the Aramaic Text of the Bilingual Inscription from Armazi*, came out in Georgian and in Russian. After the publication of Acad. G. Tsereteli's classic paper devoted to the Armazian bilingual inscription in 1941, K. Tsereteli again addressed this Aramaic inscription – so important for the study of the cultural and historical situation in pre-Christian Georgia. Along with Aramaic-language inscriptions done in Aramaic script, Aramaic-language inscriptions done in Hebrew script also occur in Georgia. These are an amulet and epitaphs from Mtskheta. As a result of deciphering and studying them, the scholar determined the existence of the term *gurg* designating a "Georgian" (hitherto Turkish and Russian terms were known). Today this term has been restored on the basis of a 5th-century epitaph, and it is gradually gaining hold in the speech of Jews.

Tsereteli did successful research into Hebraistics as well. His studies deal with Georgian-Hebrew linguistic contact. Mention should be made of his university handbook of *Biblical Hebrew*, comprising the grammar of this language, biblical texts and vocabulary of the texts (Tbilisi, 2001).

Georgian-Oriental linguistic and cultur-historical contacts were devoted a significant place in Tsereteli's scholarly work. Many studies were published in Georgian and foreign journals and collected papers.¹ In 2003 the scholar published a highly interesting study, *Ethnic Terms Denoting the Semitic Peoples in the Georgian Language*, giving the area and time of distribution of these terms, the paths of their entry into Georgian and, frequently, their etymology. To this end, along with Georgian written sources, the author discussed the Hebrew, Greek, Armenian and Syriac texts of the Bible.

The results of Tsereteli's scholarly research are widely used in the specialist

1 U.a. in Band 80 (1996) des *Oriens Christianus*: »Die Assyrier in der Korrespondenz des Königs Irakli II. von Georgien« (S. 167-176), ferner eine Besprechung (S. 268-270). (Anm. des Herausgebers H. K.)

literature. His scholarly production is given a place of honour in bibliographic references and papers. The many reviews in the scholarly press giving high assessment to Tsereteli's works attest to the considerable interest they evoke.

K. Tsereteli's educational activity is worth noting specially. At various times he delivered propaedeutic courses in Arabic, Hebrew, Aramaic and Introduction to the study of the Semitic languages (at Tbilisi State University, Tbilisi Pedagogical University and Tbilisi Institute of Asia and Africa). He was an educator of whole generations. He had set many Semitists on the path of scholarly activity, including foreigners whose post-graduate course he directed.

Acad. Tsereteli was a member of quite a few foreign scholarly societies. He was Member of Deutsche Morgenländische Gesellschaft (1971), Germany's International Society of the East (1971), International Association for the Study of the Civilizations of the Mediterranean Basin (1975), and Honorary Member of the American Oriental Society (1978). The scholar was frequently invited to foreign universities and scholarly centers to deliver lectures and present papers (Germany, France, Britain, Hungary, Italy, Finland, Poland, Russia, Iraq), as well as to take part in international scientific congresses and conferences.

In 1993 a collection of papers ("Semitica Serta Philologica") dedicated to K. Tsereteli came out in Turin; under its Latin name we find the Georgian inscription "Semitic Researches in Honour of Konstantin Tsereteli". Tsereteli's pupils, friends and colleagues from many countries are contributors to the collection (Georgia, Russia, Germany, Poland, France, Italy, USA, Finland). An extensive article on K. Tsereteli's work and a bibliography of his studies are to be found in the volume.

Acad. Konstantin Tsereteli has made a great contribution to the Semitic Studies worldwide. He passed away on February 27, 2004. His death sadly short several unfinished major projects on which he had been working for years.

Thomas V. Gamkrelidze and Guram Chikovani

Der emeritierte Professor für Altes Testament, Hebräisch und Syrisch an der Universität Nijmegen Johannes Petrus Maria van der Ploeg O. P. starb am 4. August 2004. Er war am 4. Juli 1909 in Nijmegen geboren, trat 1926 in den Dominikanerorden ein und wurde 1932 zum Priester geweiht. Nach Studien in Zwolle, Le Saulchoir und am Angelicum in Rom promovierte er 1934 zum Dr. theol. und 1946 zum Dr. S. Scripturae. Von 1934 bis 1951 dozierte er Altes Testament und Hebräisch innerhalb seines Ordens, seit 1951 lehrte er