

ORI Z. SOLTES (ed.) *National Treasures of Georgia*. London: Philip Wilson Publishers. 1999. 288 pp; 150 colour and 70 mono illustrations. £29.95.

The richness of the cultural heritage bequeathed to the Republic of Georgia (Transcaucasia) is undeniably a glory of world-stature and deserves to be much more widely known and celebrated. It was with this intention that an exhibition of selected items was planned for the United States and sponsored by the Foundation for International Arts & Education. The present lavishly illustrated volume was meant to serve as the US catalogue. However, because of a strenuous campaign in Georgia by certain forces opposed to letting such priceless treasures out of the country, the exhibition had to be postponed (?cancelled) as the catalogue was being printed. It was, nevertheless, decided to proceed with publication in honour of the copious artistic achievements described therein. Attractively priced, the work will undoubtedly serve to introduce many readers to a country and its culture, both of which are still largely cloaked in ignorance (and/or myth).

The catalogue proper, about which little needs be said, fills the second half of the book (pp. 134-278). The first half is devoted to a number of short articles on aspects of Georgia's history and culture by experts, both local and foreign. It would have been pleasant to be able simply to list the contributions with the observation that they provide an informative and thus valuable background to the exhibits. Although there is, naturally, much essential information imparted in these pages, one cannot avoid the conclusion that a conscious decision seems to have been taken here by at least some of the contributors to exaggerate the extent both in time and geography of the influence of things Georgian *sensu stricto*, a regrettable move inspired by Georgian nationalist sentiment which diminishes the whole project. An editor more familiar with the region and its language might have eliminated much of this along with a variety of other troublesome lapses (spelling, transcription, and internal inconsistencies).

The fundamental problem relates to the simplistic conviction that any historical fact affecting any region falling within the borders of Georgia as delineated by the Soviets is legitimately (by sole virtue of being so located) describable as 'Georgian'. It is this *credo* which lies behind Eduard Shevardnadze's and Culture Minister Valeri Asatiani's hyperbolic assertion in their welcoming remarks that Georgia is celebrating its 3,000th anniversary of statehood. The argument runs something like this. There are four Kartvelian languages (Georgian, Mingrelian, Laz, Svan). Of these, Georgian is the only one to possess a script, devised to facilitate the spread of Christian teaching some time in the 4th century. Though one has no reason to assume widespread, active knowledge of Georgian among the non-Georgian Kartvelian peoples until universal schooling (in Georgian, as its sisters have never been formally taught) in the early Soviet period, from circa 1930 all Georgia's Kartvelian peoples have been arbitrarily

classified as 'Georgians'. Svan is spoken in the high mountain-valleys of N.W. Georgia. The traditional Mingrelian homeland is the western flatland bordering Abkhazia, Svaneti(a) and the Georgian-speaking regions of Imereti, Lechkhumi and Guria. Until the influx of Georgian-speakers following the appearance of the Arabs in central areas in the 7th century, the coastal strip formed a Mingrelian-Laz (or Zan) continuum, but since that time the two languages have developed separately, and, since the Laz homeland lies almost exclusively within modern Turkey, Georgian is not known amongst them (and probably, though one cannot prove a negative, never was to any meaningful extent). A Mingrelian calls himself *ma-rg-al-i* (in Georgian *me-gr-el-i*), the root of which seems to be *-rg-/(e)gr-*. This is the origin of the old (for it is no longer used) areal toponym Egrisi, which features widely (often in brackets) in the present volume. The Georgian chronicles are known as *Kartlis Tskhovreba* 'Life [= History] of Kartli [= Georgia]' -- the asseveration on pp. 20 & 25 that 'Suania' was sometimes used to refer to Kartli (E. Georgia) stands in need of explanation. In the Chronicles Egrisi seems often to be used to refer to Mingrelia plus its eastern neighbour, Imereti -- Abkhazia, Svaneti(a) and Guria are NOT included, given that the Chronicles frequently mention especially the first two as separate entities alongside Egrisi (a subtlety ignored by the map on p. 82); delving into myth, the Chronicles ascribe the whole of this territory to the eponymous founder of one of the Kartvelian tribes, Egros. However, at one place Egrisi is equated with Svaneti(a), leading a scholiast to insert 'Egrisi is Svaneti(a)', and at another a scholiast writes 'Egrisi is Odishi'. This latter was a former designation for the district around Mingrelia's capital, Zugdidi, which makes this perhaps the most plausible equation in view of the etymological link between 'Egrisi' and Mingrelia's modern name *sa-ma-rg-al-o*. Now, the ancients knew the eastern littoral of the Black Sea (Pontic Euxine) as Colchis, defined by Strabo as running from Pitsunda (in the north of Abkhazia) around to Trebizond (in Turkey), whilst Braund (p. 74) traces it from slightly further north at Sochi round to 'Trabzon' -- Ch'ilashvili and Lomouri, however, define its southern limit as the Ch'orokhi estuary, which (conveniently for the Colchis = W. Georgia hypothesis) more or less incorporates all of today's Georgia plus the traditional Georgian-speaking provinces across the Turkish frontier. To the east lay Iberia (interpreted as eastern Georgia, or main home of the Georgians properly so-called). This all leads here to the bracketed exegesis of 'Colchis' on almost every occasion it appears as 'Egrisi', and one even finds a further equation of 'Egrisi' for 'Lazika', a significant political entity of Byzantine times, and Lazika would surely be a more understandable, though again not quite exact, equivalence of Colchis for Western readers unfamiliar with Georgian practice, but as 'Laz' is more associated with modern Turkey than Georgia, this does not suit the purpose of the authors, who seem set on implanting in readers' minds an exclusively Georgian identity for Colchis. Such, then,

is the 'logic' behind the equations: Colchian = Egrisian = (Laz-)Mingrelian/Western Georgian = Georgian, and such is the contrivance by which 3,000 years of 'Georgian' statehood is manufactured! This is not to deny some overlap between Colchis and Egrisi in what today happens to lie within western Georgia, but the average denizen of Colchis would undoubtedly have been amazed to find himself deemed ethnically a Georgian (?Iberian), and readers are advised to ignore this determined attempt to remould historical topography.

Furthermore, there was no unified Georgian state, in the sense of an entity spanning the eastern and western regions (divided by the Likhi mountains) until King Bagrat' III assumed the throne in 975, unifying by right of inheritance both realms, western Georgia having been known for the previous two centuries as the Abkhazian Kingdom after Abkhazian Leon II extended by force of arms Abkhazian suzerainty across Egrisi as far as the Likhi mountains, as the Chronicles clearly relate (in Georgian *daip'q'ro* 'he seized [Egrisi as far as the Likhi mountains]'). Describing this kingdom as a 'Georgian state' (p. 33) is akin to calling the British Raj an Indian state simply because the majority of citizens were Indian not British, just as by no stretch of the imagination is it justifiable to style pre-Bagrat'ian Abkhazia a 'Georgian land' (p. 89) -- as this mediæval unified state began to disintegrate in the wake of the Mongol invasions, Abkhazia became an independent principality and was not formally/legally subordinated within any entity called Georgia until Stalin engineered this in 1931. The importance played by Abkhazia in bringing Kartvelian-speaking lands together was recognised in the title of those early sovereigns, for the first of the royal peoples to be listed were always the Abkhazians (and note that, if one is going to use the Georgian term for this country, it is *apkhazeti*, not the unknown *abkhazeti* -- both are found in this work, though perhaps the preferable choice would be the Abkhazian *Apsny*; equally impossible in English is 'Apkhaz' on p. 89). It is Bagrat' III's golden bowl from the church at Bedia which adorns this book's dust-jacket. Since Bedia lies within Abkhazian territory, and Abkhazia has a long-standing territorial dispute with Georgia, the Abkhazians might object to the automatic assumption here that this bowl is an example of purely 'Georgian' gold-work, just as they would bridle at the assessment of the altar-screen from Ts'abal (Georgian Ts'ebelda) in Abkhazia as 'an outstanding example of Georgian stone-carving' (p. 206).

Many other statements throughout the work require emendation.

Blatant hypocrisy is the only phrase that comes to mind for Shevardnadze's bombast: 'No aspect of our tradition is more important than our respect for other cultures, for the ability of Georgians to share this small geographic space with other peoples whose traditions differ from those of Georgians', for it was the troops he despatched to Abkhazia in August 1992 who deliberately torched the Abkhazian state-archives and library at the Research Institute later that autumn with the aim of

obliterating the records of Abkhazian residence in what Georgians vigorously argue to be 'ancestral Georgian soil', the first half of this work being suffused with just such a spirit of propaganda. In the same vein one notes the editor's opinion: '[P]ositive portrayal of his Muslim heroes suggests, rather, an open-mindedness[,] which is not so remarkable for Georgia' (p. 50 -- stress added, for by modern standards it is exceedingly remarkable).

The editor claims in his own Introduction that 'spellings throughout this catalogue are based on what is currently the consensus among most scholars as to how most effectively to transliterate' Georgian's unique alphabet. In fact, hardly any attempt is made to distinguish between voiceless aspirates and voiceless ejectives -- there are even bizarre instances of 'q' representing not the uvular ejective (as might be expected) but the velar aspirate [k^h]!

The name 'Georgia' for the land known to natives as Sakartvelo "Home of the Kart(velian)s" has nothing to do with any term in Latin (or, more accurately, Greek) for 'farming', as stated on p. 24.

The 1783 Treaty of Georgievsk between Catherine the Great's Russia and the central/eastern kingdoms of Kartli/K'akheti under Erekle II is claimed on more than one occasion to have applied to the whole of Georgia, which is contradicted by the Chronology (p. 38) and the Georgian Encyclopædia (vol. 3 p. 86). One might also ponder how the authors of this contentious chapter ('A brief history of Georgia' by Levan Ch[']ilashvili and Nodar Lomouri) could asseverate that Christianity was declared the official religion of both Kartli and Colchis in the 330s when the converting king (Mirian) ruled only over the province of Kartli (p. 31), though parts of the eastern Black Sea coast had been converted before this -- later in the book Rapp specifically (and less controversially) limits the event to the eastern realm of Kartli (p. 84). In fact, Lomouri had previously proposed (in his contribution to volume II of *sakartvelos ist'oriis nark'vevebi* 'Essays on the History of Georgia', 1973, p. 188) this bold hypothesis on the basis of the exceptional remark in only one of the Greek sources for the Ecclesiastical History of Gelasios of Cæsarea to the effect that 'in those times the Iberians and the Laz accepted the recognition of God' (see the Greek text with Georgian translation in Simon Q'aukhchishvili's series 'Georgica I' p. 186) -- all other ancient commentators on this early 4th century development confine it to the Iberians, as, indeed crucially, does Rufinus in his Latin rendition of Gelasios (cf. p. 201 of that same edition of 'Georgica').

There is no reliable historical testimony to support the view that the 'Svans settled...as well in the gorges that later became the Abkhazian territory' (p. 30) -- see Voronov (1992.260), who also notes (p. 262) that, far from the Abkhazian church separating in the 9th century from the patriarchate in Constantinople and subordinating

itself to the *catholicos* in Mtskheta (p. 33), all the evidence rather points to Abkhazia's ecclesiastical affiliation to Byzantium continuing into the 10th century.

Since the Adyghe and Cherkess [sic] are varieties of the people we call Circassians, the linkage and sequence 'Chechen-Adigians, Cherkezians' on p. 34 looks decidedly odd. It has become a familiar mantra of the Georgian national cause that Russia is to blame for all of the country's ills over the last two centuries, which perhaps accounts for the wholly out of place presence on p. 35 of the charge: 'So, too, Russian officials began intensive attempts to incite other nationalities living in Georgia against Georgians'. Whilst Georgia may have lost some 10% of its population during World War II (as evidenced by the roll-call of the dead in Georgia's Red Book), by no means all (300,000 according to p. 36) were ethnic Georgians.

In the Chronology (p. 37) we find, as far as I know, the first attempt to claim that the 'Kask(i)s' of the Assyrian texts were a Georgian (?Kartvelian) tribe -- most commentators (including the Georgian Encyclopædia, vol. 10 p. 492) tend to speculate on a North West Caucasian connection for them.

Most of the peculiarities in Michel van Esbroeck's contribution can probably be attributed to the fact that English is not his (?translator's) native language, resulting in the introduction of deviant forms into the text. The ascription of 80 languages to the native Caucasian families, however, is excessive -- the usual maximum is 40. Correct anglicised forms are: Ingush, Bats, Luk'a Razik'ashvili, K'orneli K'ek'elidze, Ivane (*et passim*), Iliia, Elene Met'reveli, Kadzhaia/Kajaia (*et passim*). Georgians do not call their native language Kartlian (p. 40), for this is but the dialect of the central district -- they call it (as noted on p. 82) *kartuli* (presumably this is what *Kartlevi* on p. 84 is striving to convey).

McGovern suggests that the familiar Indo-European root for 'wine' 'is believed to have its origin in the Transcaucasus' (p. 58). The late Kartvelian specialist, Giorgij Klimov, on the other hand, follows most observers in treating it as an early loan from Indo-European.

Braund does not explain how it is possible for him to assert (in a rather strangely constructed sentence) of (?early) Colchis that: 'The spoken language of the region was a form of Georgian (Kartlian), for it is pre-Indo-European, but Georgian seems to have had no script until the fifth century AD' (p. 76) -- varieties of Kartvelian (along with ancestral Abkhaz-Abaza and other languages) may well have been spoken here in the 1st millennium BC, but to speak only of Georgian (and of Kartlian at that) is utterly unacceptable.

Rapp's linguistic digression (p. 84) informs us that: 'The Georgian language does not distinguish capital letters'. In fact, no language makes this distinction -- the statement has meaning only with reference to scripts. To say (p. 85) that the Scythians and Sarmatians were 'highly Persianized' sounds infelicitous when what is presumably

meant is that these tribes spoke Iranian languages (cognate with Persian). I would contend that the term 'Transcaucasian' is actually fully appropriate from a Western perspective, for it is not only from the hated Russian territories that Georgia lies 'beyond' the Caucasus; in Georgian the Transcaucasus is referred to as *amierk'avk'asia*, which is literally 'Ciscaucasia' -- perhaps there will soon be moves to foist this too on us by the sort of "purists" who have suddenly developed a fondness for Beijing over the perfectly serviceable Peking.

The zeugma 'Ninots[']minda, in the northern central province of Rach[']a' on p. 96 is oxymoronic (and, according to the author of the relevant chapter, just one of the errors introduced during a clearly deficient editorial process). Ninots'minda is in the south-east, whereas Rach'a is in the north-west central mountain-region and is home to the beautiful church of Nik'orts'minda, which is perhaps what was meant here. A similarly impossible collocation is 'Ninots[']minda, in the northeast' on p. 99. The Gelati monastery-complex is in the Imereti region, not Rach'a, as stated on p. 105. The small church at Bolnisi hardly merits the description 'great cathedral' (p. 108). Ananuri is by any reckoning a considerable distance north of Tbilisi, hardly 'not far north' (p. 109). I am puzzled by the references to Mtats[']minda in: 'The most famous of the Fathers was St David Garejeli, who lived on Mtats[']minda (the Holy Mountain) in what is now Tbilisi before retreating to a cave in the hostile desert region of Gareja...At the height of Mtats[']minda's popularity between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries...' (p. 110). Firstly, his 'Life' states that Davit arrived in Georgia at Mtskheta, whence he decamped to the south-eastern desert; secondly, in what sense could the "Holy Mount" in the centre of Tbilisi be said to have been 'popular' during this period?

I think it is to insult the memory of the distinguished man of letters Ak'ak'i Ts'ereteli (1840-1915) to style him, as does the editor on p. 262, one of the fathers of modern Georgian nationalism, when one considers the stains inflicted on Georgia's reputation by this perverse ideology over recent years.

Bedia may be in Abkhazia, but the further ascription 'west central Georgia' is a further irritation (p. 276).

Despite the above-criticisms, the sheer beauty of the objects photographed probably transcends the negative features in some of the accompanying texts and betokens a high level of skill and refinement among the people(s) who can boast responsibility for their creation and enjoyment. Readers should, thus, let the works speak for themselves, concentrating on the catalogue-section and treating the backgrounding with a healthy degree of circumspection.

Corrigenda

p.18: Antony Eastmond is an art-historian; p.29 map: K'odor(i); p.33: Adyghean (*et passim*); Saeristavo; Kuropalates (*et passim*); p.34: Cherkess(ians); p.37: Bich'vinta;

Shushanik'; p.41: *Moambe*; p.42: Mtats'mindeli (*et passim*); p.44: *mandaturtukhutsesi*; p.45: Iadgari; Giorgi; Bak'urianisdze; p.57: Lch'ashen; p.61: interment; p. 85: Surguladze...Essays on the History; p.105: Ivlit'a; p.106: Garedzhi or Gareji; Q'int's'visi (*et passim*); p.107: kt'it'ors (donors); Ts'alendzhikha; p.111: Ingur; p.116: 'personality'; p.121: Lechkhumi; p.122: Silogava; p.136: Chalcolithic; p.209: rulers; p.216: Apkhazeti; p.228: the Hebrew script; p.237: the Messiah; p.264: is it P'ap'ava or Pagava? p.270: ts'eltaghritskhvis (*et passim*); Sakartvelos arkeologia (*et passim*); Ananuri (*et passim*); p.272: ant'ik'uri mokhat'uli; moakhalsheneta; p.273: Aghmosavlet (*et passim*); Ant'ik'uri; pich'vnaris samarovnidan; p.274: Nakalakari; p.275: nakalakaridan; sakartveloshi; ?K'arak'alas; zghudis; issledovanija; p.276: Lechkhumi; p.280: Vepkhist'q'aosnis; Mach'avariani; variant'ebi; p.282: p.284: Jibisdze; p.285: Nariq'ala; Luk'a.

Reference

Voronov, Yuri. 1992. Review-article of Mariam Lordkipanidze "The Abkhazians and Abkhazia (in Georgian, Russian and English)", in (B.) G. Hewitt (ed.) *Caucasian Perspectives*, 259-264.

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