

TEACHING ARMENIAN LANGUAGE AND CULTURE AT TBILISI STATE UNIVERSITY (TSU)

*Tinatin Soziashvili,
Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University
t.soziasvili@gmail.com*

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Abstract

This paper discusses the establishment and development process of the department of Armenology at Tbilisi State University. The main goal is to introduce the development environment for Armenological studies at different stages at Tbilisi State University.

The first part of this paper consists of a historical review. In the second part of the article, the current situation is analyzed. The information on the TSU website and curriculum structures are studied. The teaching-learning process at the department of Armenology is also observed. In addition to observation, the main research methods used in this study rely on semi-structured and in-depth interviews with professors and students.

It should be noted that the Armenology Department suffers from a lack of students; the studies in this direction are not as intensive as in the past. Mainly, the Georgian-Armenians – citizens of Georgia, – and some Georgian and Turkish students from Vani are showing interest in studying Armenian.

The clear decline of the Armenology sphere does not really indicate any unawareness of its importance, especially for historians and linguists. Moreover, it does not mean that there is no need for Armenology anymore or for the Armenian sources in general. It all depends on the market economy, which determines scientific interests. Nowadays, the humanities – including Armenology as its branch – is generally not favored.

Throughout their longstanding neighborly co-existence, Georgians and Armenians always had a close relationship. Cultural relations existed within the framework of strides in literary and scientific ties. Many artistic or scientific works were translated from Armenian to Georgian and vice versa. This process was intense and promotes cultural cooperation.¹

The interest in Armenian culture and language has always existed in Georgian society.² The interest was deepened when Niko Marr appeared in the scientific arena in the 19th century.

Mr. Zaza Alexidze views the basics of Armenology in the more distant past in Georgia. From 1978-2015, he worked as the head of the Tbilisi State University, Department of Armenology. Since 2007, he has been a professor and the head of the Bachelor of Arts (BA) program of Armenology at TSU.

The development of Armenology in Georgia as a scientific discipline is connected to French Orientalist and Kartvelologist (Georgian studies expert) Marie-Felicite Brosset. Zaza Aleksidze finds that the starting point of Armenian studies in Georgia is connected to the development of the historical proceedings. He cooperated with Georgian historians and had a strong command of the Georgian language. Marie Brosset translated "The Georgian Chronicles" in French. He was not an Armenologist, but in the process of working with Georgian documents, he used Armenian sources. The new era of Armenology is connected with Niko Marr's name. Niko Marr was a linguist, philologist, Orientalist, archaeologist, and a cultural historian. After gaining his initial education background at Kutaisi gymnasium, he then entered the Faculty of Oriental Studies of St. Petersburg University (with the specialization on Georgian Studies) in 1884. Niko Marr largely contributed to the development of Georgian and Armenian Linguistics. Marr studied the Armenian language, and the Georgian and Armenian languages' relation to other languages. He was one of those scholars who praised the theory or idea that the Armenian language does not belong to the Indo-European family of languages: it was

¹ Alexidze Zaza. Christian Caucasus, History and Philology Studies, volume 2, 2011, Tbilisi, p.391-396

² Ibid.,p.391-396

independent. Niko Marr categorically stated, " [The] Armenian language is still an unsolved mystery for scientists." Marr studied the relationship between the Armenian and Georgian languages in the initial period of their formation and noted that Armenians and Georgians' distant ancestors had close neighborly relations.³ In Zaza Alexidze's opinion, this field can be referred to as Georgian-Armenian philology, which aimed to raise and solve the problems of the Christian Caucasus. Niko Marr is also connected with the group of scholars that partake in "thinking within the new approaches." Ivahe Javakhishvili was one of the members of the group.⁴ In 1895, after graduating from the gymnasium, Ivane Javakhishvili entered the Armenian-Georgian-Iranian section of the St. Petersburg University Faculty of Oriental Studies, mainly focusing on Georgian and Armenian history. Iv. Javakhishvili studied Georgian Language and Literature by Alexander Tsagareli (a well-known linguist, philosopher, historian, paleographers, journalist, essayist and literary critic, who was elected as an Assistant Professor of Georgian Narratives. The whole energy of his own was dedicated to the fight for rights of the Georgian Narratives at the St. Petersburg University,) at the University of St. Petersburg, Armenian language and literature - by Niko Marr. Iv. Javakhishvili lectured at St. Petersburg University Faculty of Oriental Languages. He held the position of Private-Dozent at the Department of Armenian-Georgian Philology and was enrolled in a number of special courses on the history of Georgia and Armenia, as well as historical studies of the aforementioned countries. The courses were based on the results of his own scientific research. In 1907, Ivane Javakhishvili successfully defended a Masters thesis on "The Old State System of Georgia and Armenia." Ivane Jvakhishvili and his collaborators were aware that the development of Armenology was closely

³ Baramidze Alexander. Essays on the history of Georgian literature. Volume 5, publishing house "Metsniereba", Tbilisi, 1971, p. 239-279

Chikobava Arnold. Ibero-Caucasian languages, the study of history. Publishing house "Ganatileba", Tbilisi, 1965, p. 324-326.

Dzidziguri Shota. Niko Mari Georgian cultural researcher. Publishing house "Metsniereba", 1985, p. 15, 105-106

⁴ Alexidze Zaza. Christian Caucasus, History and Philology Studies, volume 2, 2011, Tbilisi, p.391-396

tied to the development of Georgian Studies. Due to this, Armenology courses were introduced in the curriculum in the newly established University in 1918. In 1922, the faculty of Armenology at Tbilisi State University was established. In 1945, the Department of Armenian Language and Literature was introduced. It currently operates under the same curriculum and is targeted for students specialized in Armenology.⁵ In 1929, the professor at the University of Leon Melikset-Beg (1890-1963) became the Chair of Armenology Department, Tbilisi-Armenian sect. He was a chair until his death in 1963. His interests were wide and included the literature, archeology, art history, ethnography, epigraphy, law, bibliography of Armenian studies, etc. He was knowledgeable in Armenian and Georgian languages, both ancient and modern. His work served as a bridge between Georgian studies and Armenology.⁶ Armenology actively developed during the times of Ilia Abuladze (1901-1968.) He was a philologist, a specialist in ancient Georgian language and literature, Armenologist, lexicographer, and Rustvelologist. He was a founder of the Institute of Manuscripts and served as its first director from 1959-1968. Ilia Abuladze is an author of more than one hundred scholarly works, among which a significant part is dedicated to the Georgian-Armenian philological problems. His analysis of ancient literary sources has revealed bilaterally within Georgian-Armenian literary relations.⁷

Ancient and modern Armenian languages have consistently been actively studied in Georgia. Among the significant amount of scholars engaged in it was David Kipshidze (1890-1919.) He graduated from St.

⁵Javakhishvili Ivane. Works in twelve volumes, volume I, Tbilisi State University, Tbilisi 1979, p.10-30

Kaukhchishvili Simon, Ivane Javakhishvili, Publishing house "Ganatleba", Tbilisi 1976, p.3-38

⁶Jikia sergi. professor-Leon Melkiset Beg life and work. Tbilisi State University, Volume 99, Oriental Series III, 1962, p.9-16

Babunashvili Zaur, Nozadze Teimuraz, Patriot Cloister, Tbilisi, 1994, p. 265-266

⁷Private archives description - Ilia Abuladze, National Center of Manuscripts, volume 2, 2010 of Tbilisi, p.7-12

Babunashvili Zaur, Nozadze Teimuraz, Patriot Cloister, Tbilisi, 1994, p.27-28

Philological-historical explorations, Mravaltavi X, dedicated to the 80th anniversary of Ilia Abuladze, Tbilisi, 1983, p. 3-15

Petersburg University Faculty of Oriental Studies, with the specialization in Georgian Studies. He was actively involved in the work of the “Georgian Studies Circle,” lead by Ivane Javakhishvili. In 1916, D. Kipshidze graduated from the St. Petersburg University Department of Georgian-Armenian Studies. He studied the cave cities, including the capital of Armenia, Anisi. In 1918, he was invited to the University of Tbilisi where he taught the Armenian language until his death in 1919.⁸

Ivan (Vano) Shilakadze was born on May 24, 1910. He graduated from Tbilisi State University with honors in 1937. Since 1938, he was a postgraduate student of the University. He defended his Candidate Thesis in 1944 and since then, he became a University Professor. In 1964, Ivan was elected as the head of the Department of Armenology until his death in 1978. In 1966, he defended a doctoral thesis and was awarded the honorary title of a professor. In the last years of his life, Ivane Shilakadze founded an Armenian seminar, which aimed to unify specialists working in different scientific institutions. The seminar was regularly conducted, and representatives from the neighboring sectors also participated. Under his guidance, the library of the Armenology Chair (which was based on his teacher and lecturer Leon Melikset-Beg's library) was filled with unique literature. After his death, according to his desire, the Chair (which consisted of about 700 literary works) was given to his personal library of Armenology.

Ivane Shilakadze is the author of about 80 works (mainly about Georgian-Armenian linguistic issues,) and among them, five are published as separate books, which include the old and new Armenian grammar textbooks that are not still missing the actuality. Together with scientific and pedagogical work, he was involved in intensive translation processes (translated and published many works of Armenian classics and modern authors.) Ivane Shilakadze spent a great time studying Georgian folk music and authored several interesting works in this field too.⁹

⁸Babunashvili Zaur, Nozadze Teimuraz, Patriot Cloister, Tbilisi, 1994, p.360-361

⁹ Chantladze, N. (2017, April 7). Ivane Shalikadze. (Interview with T. Soziashvili) Tbilisi.

To analyze the current situation, Prof. Zaza Alexidze mentioned that the interest in Armenology is increased among Georgian citizens with ethnic Armenian backgrounds. According to Mr. Alexidze's opinion, the Armenology department obtained a new function: to make ethnic Armenians familiar to the Georgian School of Armenology and thus to the Georgian-Armenian scholarly interrelations. Mr. Aelksidze hopes that in the future, there will be better opportunities established for Georgian-Armenian academic cooperation and for the students whose native language is Armenian and will be able to be involved in the teaching process at high schools after finishing their studies at the Armenology Department.

The Armenology program is included in the Oriental Studies curriculum at Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University, Faculty of Humanities, among which there are programs such as Turkish, Iranian, Arabic studies, etc. As identified by the head of the Armenology Department and by the lecturers, there is a need for Armenian language and literature in almost every field (teaching and research institutions, libraries, museums, foreign affairs and diplomatic missions, regional relations, internal and border agencies etc.) At first glance, the market demand for Armenian language and literature, in their opinion, is quite large.

To analyze the current Armenology teaching situation, the information regarding the program on the TSU website has been investigated. It contains the general description of the program as well as the outlines of the courses. Syllabi were introduced in 2011-2012. The main objective of the program is to encapture the wide humanitarian perception of science. In the goals of the program, the Armenology program prepares students for the labor market as practitioners, and as research and analytical workers. Armenology is the area that includes the work on problematic and controversial concerns regarding Georgian-Armenian relations. This program aims to provide knowledge on improving the understanding of cultural diversity, and supports tolerance towards different cultures and respecting the freedom of thought.¹⁰

¹⁰https://www.tsu.ge/data/file_db/QA_humanities/BA_Armenologia.pdf(Last available at 11/10/2016)

The Faculty of Humanities Armenology Bachelor programs include highly qualified specialists in the field, rounding appropriate training, guest lecturers, teachers and researchers, who have appropriate academic profiles and degrees, and teaching and research experience. Zaza Alexidze - Full Professor (former head) teaches subjects such as Classical Armenian language, Georgian-Armenian linguistic and literary relations, The History of Relations between the Georgian and Armenian Churches from the 4th-19th centuries, and Theory and Practice of translating from Armenian into Georgian. Since the departure of Zaza Alexidze, Natia Chantladze - Doctor of History (head of the department) is teaching the aforementioned subjects as well as the Modern Armenian language, History of Armenian Literature and Folklore, and a practice course on translation and interpreting in the Modern Armenian language. Nino Gokadze - (guest teacher,) is a language specialist and is teaching students the Modern Armenian language. Lela Jejelava - the teacher from Language Centre, is interested in modern Armenian politics, economy, and society. Dali Chitunashvili - Doctor (guest teacher) teaches the history of Armenia.

The Armenology program contains 17 courses:¹¹

1. **Modern Armenian language 1,2,3,4.** This is a course that teaches students the Armenian alphabet and Armenian language phonetics. Students learn the necessary vocabulary and start to understand simple texts. After the completing the course, the students are knowledgeable in basic vocabulary: they can write, read, translate, and express themselves in Armenian. The outline guarantees to give students a solid knowledge-base of the Armenian language phonetic-phonological, morphological, and syntactic systems.

2. **Classical Armenian language 1, 2, 3.:** The course offers knowledge of classical Armenian Language, it's morphological and syntaxes' peculiarities. After completing the course, the students will be able to read the texts (literary and historical sources, epigraphic inscriptions) in classical Armenian of average complexity.

¹¹https://www.tsu.ge/data/file_db/faculty_humanities/Armenian%20Studies.pdf
(Last Available 23/11/2016)

3. Theory and practice of translating from Armenian into Georgian: This course offers students the opportunity to improve their skills in artistic and scientific translation. The students will be acquainted with the peculiarities of translation.

4. History of the Armenian Literature and Folklore 1, 2, 3.: The course teaches Armenian literature, history, and folklore of the early period. The knowledge of major genres of literature and the content of main works will be transmitted. The focus will be fixed on the texts of X-XIV cc. through the history of the XV-XX cc. Armenian Literature will be also discussed.

5. History of Armenia 1, 2: One part of the course will study the Armenian history from ancient times to the tenth century. The second part of the course covers the eleventh century to the beginning of the twentieth century. Students will learn about the peculiarities of the development of Armenian culture, as well as the epoch of historical sources and scientific literature. They will analyze and contribute to Georgian-Armenian historical relations.

6. Armenia today (politics, economics, society). The course will examine the situation in the USSR and Armenia's declaration of independence. The main focus will be Georgian-Armenian relations in the modern era, its problems, and prospects.

7. The History of relations of the Georgian and Armenian Churches in IV-XIX cc.: This course explores the history of relations between Georgian and Armenian churches, and the characteristics of beliefs and ritual practices. These are the issues, which are important to study the history and literature of the Christian Caucasus.

8. Georgian-Armenian linguistic and literary relations: This course discusses the Georgian-Armenian literary and linguistic relations, its problems, and the ways of their analyses.

9. Practice in translation and interpretation of modern Armenian language: This course offers the opportunity to improve the skills and knowledge of translation, the knowledge of solid syntactic and phraseological constructions, and modern terminology, which are usually

used in official speeches and communication in media, correspondence, documents, and notarial activities.

I applied observation and interviewing for data collection regarding the teaching-learning process at the department of Armenology. The interviews were a combination of semi-structured and in-depth with the professors and students.

Our findings show that the Armenology Department suffers from a lack of students. At present, there are only 10 students. The ethnic composition of the students is the following: six Armenian, two Turkish, and two Georgian students. The students that are interested in studying Armenian are Georgian Armenians – citizens of Georgia. This can be explained by several reasons: first, Armenian is their native language and their desire and interest to learn it is high, the explanation is that they want to know more about the country of their historical origins. During the interviews, two students mentioned that it is very difficult to find a job after finishing this program, so they decided to pursue a major in Georgian Philology and keep Armenology as a minor. This strategy provides them with a strong possibility to be prepared after graduation and to go back to their villages to begin working at the Armenian schools as teachers.

The students from Turkey noted that Armenology is not taught in Turkish universities, which is why they decided to come to Georgia. They learn Georgian and Armenian in efforts to have a specific knowledge, which is rare in Turkey and thus is in higher demand in the labor market to gain more income. During the conversation, the students noted that they are coming from the city of Van in Turkey, which was an Armenian-populated territory in old times, and nowadays is settled by Turkish Armenians. Elderly people there still remember the Armenian language. One student's grandmother was of Armenian descent. He often goes to Yerevan. Despite the fact that students identify themselves as Turks, they are proving their Armenian roots and they do believe that the knowledge of Armenian will improve their career possibilities.

For this study I conducted interviews with the professors of Armenology Department Prof. Zaza Alexidze, Prof. Natia Chantladze and

Nino Gokadze. The former head of the TSU Department of Armenology Prof. Alexidze himself was studying at the faculty of history and decided to study the Armenian language. He had outstanding professors such as Ivane Shilakadze and Ilia Abuladze. These teachers influenced his future. Later, he started to work at the Institute of Manuscripts and deepened his knowledge in the field. He also had the possibility to visit the Armenian villages to practice the language and improve his speaking skills.

Prof. Alexidze remembers how interesting of a field it was when he was a student. In his opinion, the reason may come from the former education system when the students at the Faculty of History, Department of Oriental Studies were attending the courses held by the Turkologists, Iranists, Armenologists, etc. The students were receiving the necessary overview on the subjects and later on they were making their own decision on which direction to choose.

Prof. Alexidze states that the number of ethnic Georgian students willing to study Armenology is decreasing, especially after gaining independence. They are more attracted to the Far East Countries and its cultures and travel possibilities, thus the neighboring Armenia is dropped out of their interests.

There was a period when the Georgian citizens with Armenian origins started to be more active. They were studying Armenian culture and language. Currently, the Armenology department is in crisis due to the students. Prof. Alexidze still hopes that the problem will be resolved and the students will again gain the interest in such an interesting and important field.

Since 2015, Prof. Natia Chantladze has been the head of the Department of Armenology at TSU. She was interested in history and archeology, but the role of Prof. Zaza Alexidze was a significant factor in her decision to become an Armenologist. Prof. Alexidze encouraged her interest in investigating Georgian-Armenian historical sources, and she decided to choose Armenology considering the wanting to be involved in scientific research in the future. Gokadze Nino, the Armenian specialist, thinks that her life was accidentally connected to the department of Armenology. When she was entering the University, the Armenology

department was easily accessible compared to the others, thus she decided to study the Armenian language. Both professors are devoted to their works and the Department. They are trying to attract and engage students in the learning process of Armenian culture. In their opinion, one of the reasons that first-grade students of ethnic Georgians do not continue their studies in the Armenology Department is the complexity of the discipline, which includes the necessity to study the Armenian language. An even more problematic factor is the employment-perspective.

Conclusion

Armenian language and Armenian-lingual sources were always of high interest in Georgia in the past. This interest introduces such a group of great scholars as Niko Marr, Ivane Javakhishvili, Ilia Abuladze, etc. The Department of Armenology at TSU was established quite early and it exists today. However, it should be noted that the studies in this direction are not as intensive as before. The Armenology department experiences the lack of students. As Prof. Zaza Alexidze mentioned in one of his books, "The Christian Caucasus," the current Armenology profile has been modified. Before, the main research field consisted of Armenian written sources for comparative analyses of Georgian history, whereas now more attention is paid to Armenian philology. The students with this kind of knowledge are going to be involved in pedagogical activities at the schools. In the best cases, they will work as translators and will be employed at companies and non-governmental organizations where the Armenian language is necessary, but such cases are rare.

The clear decline of the Armenology sphere of does not really stipulate the unawareness of its importance, especially for historians and linguists; but it does not mean that there is no need to understand the meaning of Armenology anymore or of the Armenian sources. It all depends on the market economy, which determines scientific interests. Nowadays, the humanities – including Armenology as a distinct branch – is not generally popular.

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ՕՐԻՆԱԿ
Ամփոփագիր

*Թինաթին Սոզիաշվիլի,
Իվանե Զավախիշվիլի Թբիլիսի Պետական Համալսարան
t.sozishvili@gmail.com*

*Բանալի բառեր. Հայագիտություն, ԹՊՀ, կրթություն,
աշխատաշուկա:*

Այս հոդվածում քննարկվում է Թբիլիսիի պետական համալսարանում հայագիտության բաժնի հիմնադրման ու զարգացման գործընթացը: Հիմնական նպատակն է ներկայացնել Թբիլիսիի պետական համալսարանում հայկական ուսումնասիրությունների միջավայրը տարբեր ժամանակահատվածներում:

Ուսումնասիրության առաջին մասը բաղկացած է պատմական վերլուծությունից: Հոդվածի երկրորդ մասում վերլուծվում է ներկայիս դրությունը: Դիտարկվել են ԹՊՀ կայքում տեղադրված տեղեկությունները և դասընթացների կառուցվածքները: Հայագիտության բաժնում սովորելու-սովորեցնելու գործընթացները ևս դիտարկվել են: Ի հավելումն դիտարկումների, որպես հիմնական ուսումնասիրության մեթոդներ կիրառվել են կիսաստանդարտացված և խորին հարցազրույցներ դասախոսների և ուսանողների հետ:

Պետք է նշել, որ հայագիտության բաժնում կա ուսանողների պակաս, իսկ դասընթացներն այս ուղղությամբ այնքան ինտենսիվ չեն, որքան անցյալում: Հիմնականում վրացահայերը՝ Վրաստանի

քաղաքացիներ, ինչպես նաև որոշ վրացի և Վանից թուրք ուսանողներ հետաքրքրություն են ցուցաբերում հայերենի ուսումնասիրության գործում:

Հայագիտության ոլորտի հանդեպ հետաքրքրության հստակ անկումը չի վկայում դրա կարևորության չգիտակցման մասին, հատկապես պատմաբանների ու լեզվաբանների շրջանում: Ավելին, դա չի նշանակում, որ հայագիտության կամ հայկական աղբյուրների ուսումնասիրության՝ ընդհանուր առմամբ կարիքն այլևս չկա: Այս ամենը կախված է շուկայական տնտեսությունից, որը մեծապես պայմանավորում է նաև գիտակրթական հետաքրքրությունները: Ներկայումս հումանիտար ոլորտները, որոնց մի ճյուղ է նաև հայագիտությունը, ընդհանուր առմամբ շատ պահանջարկ չունեն՝ հետագայում աշխատատեղերի սակավության պատճառով: