The Rise and Fall and Revival of the Ibero-Caucasian Hypothesis*

Kevin Tuite
Université de Montréal

1. *Introduction*

Let us consider, for a moment, the languages of the world not as means of communication or components of ethnic or social identity, but rather as objects of scholarly investigation. If one were to classify groups of languages according to the ethnolinguistic affiliations of the researchers who study them, then at one end of the scale, let us say the right, would be those language families primarily studied by native speakers of a language belonging to that family, and at the left end those studied by non-native speakers. The Indo-European, Finno-Ugrian, and perhaps some of the major Asian language families would be at or close to the right end of the scale. Closer to the other extreme would be a large number of language families, some of them only recently described, that are spoken in the Americas and the Pacific. I have not in fact done a survey of the world's language families according to this parameter, but I suspect strongly that if one were to do so, and plot the results on a map, they would correlate to a significant degree with the geography of colonialism.

But the proportion of non-native to native linguists does not necessarily remain constant over time. If speakers of indigenous American, African and Oceanic languages were once a rarity among professional linguists, their numbers have increased significantly in recent decades. Certainly this development qualifies as a positive step in the evolution of academic linguistics. At the same time, the long history of Indo-European studies teaches us that the study, even by academically-qualified professionals, of languages and cultures to which the researchers perceive

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an affiliation, or through which they reconstruct a history in which they situate their own ancestors, is perpetually at risk of distortion by chauvinist bias. Illustrative examples are legion: the longstanding conviction that flexional Greek and Sanskrit were somehow more perfect than agglutinative or isolating languages; the debate over the Indo-European Urheimat; the projection of idealized physical and moral traits — blond hair, blue eyes, the will to conquer — on populations that lived seven millennia ago.

In the case of the Caucasian languages, native-speaker scholars, most of them Georgians, became prominent in the field in the late 19th century, and during the Soviet period researchers speaking North and South Caucasian languages came to compose the majority of professional Caucasologists. The rise to dominance of indigenous researchers had, on the whole, a highly positive impact on the field. It was also accompanied by the increasing acceptance of the hypothesis that the autochthonous Caucasian languages belong to a distinct family with a common ancestor. This postulated community of languages was called the 'Ibero-Caucasian' family in post-war Soviet linguistics. The thread of Caucasian historical linguistics was woven into the broader tissue of ethnocultural history since the beginning of the discipline, but from the 1950s to the present, currents came to the forefront in the historiography of Transcaucasia that were, like reconstructions of Indo-European warriors, driven by idealized templates of the past that doubled as models for the future. In Georgia in particular, Caucasian linguistics continues to be recruited into political, or in any case politicized, discourses.

In this paper the history of the Ibero-Caucasian concept will be presented against the background of Caucasian linguistics, crudely divided into three periods. In addition to the original documentation, my presentation draws on the surveys of Caucasian linguistics by Javaxišvili (1937: 3–91), Klimov (1969), and Čikobava (1965), each of whom was himself a major participant in the debate over the Ibero-Caucasian question. The overview of the field presented in this paper is not intended to be complete. The focus will be on scholars based in the Caucasus or the political units to which it belonged, especially those who studied Caucasian languages at first hand. I will also skip over the flurry of long-range phyla said to include Caucasian languages which have been proposed in recent years, such as "Dene-Caucasian" and "Proto-World" (Bengtson 1992; Bengtson & Ruhlen 1994).

2. *Leibnizian linguistics: Word-lists, Sprachproben and 'philologie ethnographique'*

Early descriptions of the Caucasus by Pliny the Elder and Strabo told of dozens or even hundreds of tribes, each with its own language, gathering at Dioscurias (modern-day Sukhumi) to trade with Roman merchants. The medieval Georgian

chronicler Leont'i Mroveli attributed the ethnic and linguistic diversity of the Caucasus to the initial settlement of the region after the destruction of the Tower of Babel, when a descendant of Noah named Targamos and his numerous sons founded the nations of the North and South Caucasus (Brosset 1858: 15–17; cf. Boeder 1998: 74). This legend could be deemed the first manifestation of what would much later be called the Ibero-Caucasian hypothesis. Gesner's *Mithridates* of 1555 recorded the names of a handful of languages from the western Caucasus, including Circassian, "Abgazari" (probably Abkhazian) and Georgian, but detailed information concerning indigenous Caucasian languages in the pre-modern period — except for a few scattered attestations of words and phrases from unwritten languages in the accounts of 16th–17th century travellers and missionaries (Čikobava 1965: 21–22) — was limited to Georgian, the only such language to have a long history of use in writing.[1]

Interest in classifying languages into families, which goes back as least as far as Dante's grouping of the Romance languages according to their words for 'yes', entered a new and more active phase in the early 18th century. Information about hither-to unknown peoples and languages of Asia and the Americas came into the hands of scholars such as Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, who recognized that there was no better method 'for specifying the relationship and origin of the various peoples of the earth, than the comparison of their languages' (Klaproth 1831:vii; cf. Benes 2004: 118). In order to classify as many languages as possible in genealogical groupings, Leibniz proposed that similar materials be collected from each newly-described language. To this end he asked that explorers either obtain translations of well-known Christian prayers such as the Pater Noster, or, better yet, "words for common things" ("vocabula rerum vulgarium"), a sample list of which he appended to a letter to the Turkologist D. Podesta (Leibniz 1989b [1768]). The word list included numerals, kinship terms, body parts, *necessitates* (food, drink, weapons, domestic animals), *naturalia* (God, celestial and weather phenomena, topographic features, wild animals) and a dozen verbs (eat, drink, speak, see …).[2] Leibniz took a particular interest in the expansion of the Russian Empire southward and eastward, and lists based on his model were taken on expeditions sent by the tsars to study the territories recently brought under their control, as well as the peoples living on these and on nearby lands (Adelung 1815).

1. The former two were grouped by Gesner with the "Sclavonic" languages, whereas Georgian was said to be intermediate between Tatar and Armenian: "Tartaricæ et Armenicæ media est" (Gesner 1555: 26).

2. On 18th-century collections of word-lists using Leibniz's method, see also Gulya (1974); Trautmann (1997: 55; 2001); Benes (2004).

Even before Leibniz's time, the Abkhaz-Turkish merchant Evliya Çelebi had collected short vocabularies of Georgian, Mingrelian, Abkhaz, Circassian and Ubykh during a voyage to the eastern Black Sea coast in 1646–1647 (Çelebi 1983; Gippert 1992). Çelebi's language data, consisting in the numbers up to ten or twelve, names of foods and domestic animals, useful phrases ("Where are you going?", "We ate pork"), and some pungent insults, was intended for travelers and traders rather than linguists. The earliest known inventory of Caucasian languages using a Leibnizian common-vocabulary list was collected by Philip Johan von Strahlenberg (1667–1747) in 1730, who recorded up to 55 words each in four Daghestanian languages (Avar, "Kaitak" [Lak], Kubachi [Dargwa], "Curali" [= Lezgian]), plus Circassian (Strahlenberg 1730; Čikobava 1965: 22). The first attempt at systematic classification, however, did not come until forty years later. Hartwig Bacmeister (1730–1806), a German scholar in the service of the Russian Academy of Sciences at St. Petersburg, formulated guidelines for the collection of linguistic data based on Leibniz's principles. Bacmeister emphasized the necessity of gathering lexical items which reflected the ways of life of the peoples speaking the various languages of the Empire, rather than employing artifacts of Western Christian civilization, such as the Lord's Prayer, as elicitation tools (Adelung 1815: 23–32; Tintemann 2004). Beginning with *Gott* and *Herr*, Bacmeister's expanded list of nearly 300 words comprised a selection of terms from each of Leibniz's suggested categories, as well as a small number of basic adjectives.

Among the first group of researchers employing the new data-gathering method was Johann Anton Güldenstädt (1745–1781), a naturalist by training, who undertook an expedition to the North and South Caucasus in the years 1770 until 1773. During his three and a half years in the region, escorted by Kabardian and Georgian princes and dozens or even hundreds of armed men, Güldenstädt collected translations of his word set from representatives of twenty-two speech communities, and classified their languages and dialects in groups according to perceived similarities and differences among the 260 to 290 lexemes on each list. In addition to the Iranian languages Persian, Kurdish and Ossetic, Güldenstädt identified seventeen "dialects" (*Mundarten*), which he grouped in the following four clusters.

I. "Georgianische Mundarten" (= Kartvelian or South Caucasian family)
   Georgian, Mingrelian, Svan
II. "Mizdschegische Mundarten" (1834: 149) (= Nakh group of Northeast Caucasian family)
   Chechen, Ingush, Ts'ova-Tush (Batsbi)
III. "Lesgische Sprache" (1834: 157–168). (= Daghestanian group of Northeast Caucasian family)

[Güldenstädt described eight "dialects": Avar, Dido (Tsez), Kapuchin (Bezhta), Andi, Dargi (two dialects), Lak and Lezgi; he did not record several small Tsezic and Andian languages, nor the languages of the Lezgian group (except for Lezgi itself)]

IV. "Abchasetische oder Abasaische und Tscherkessische Sprache" (1834: 131–132, 135) (= Abkhaz-Adyghean or Northwest Caucasian family) Circassian, Abkhaz-Abaza [Güldenstädt did not describe Ubykh]

Corresponding to each of the four groups was an ancestral language (*Grundsprache*), each of which appeared to him to be 'unrelated either to any [other] Caucasian language or in general any language known to me' (Güldenstädt 1834: 149; cf. pp. 135, 157).[3] It is a remarkable achievement that Güldenstädt, who had no specialized training in philology or linguistics, and whose judgments were based on lists of words in each of the above languages, transcribed in a crude notation based on the sound values of German letters (and therefore wildly inadequate to the rendering of the complex phonetics of Caucasian languages), arrived at a classification of the speech varieties in his corpus that is little different from the one accepted by most linguists of the present day.[4] Güldenstädt's grouping of the South and Northwest Caucasian languages into families is now regarded as uncontroversial. The Nakh and Daghestanian groups were thought to be distinct by some linguists until quite recently, but a genetic link between them has been demonstrated on the basis of cognate sets and regular sound correspondences by Nichols (2003). No further grouping of these languages has met with the approval of a clear majority of specialists in the field of Caucasian linguistics. There is as yet no convincing evidence that the three Caucasian language stocks — Abkhaz-Adyghean, Nakh-Daghestanian, and Kartvelian — are related either among themselves, or to any languages spoken elsewhere.

The next Caucasian expedition of any consequence for the study of local languages was undertaken by Julius Heinrich (von) Klaproth (1783–1835) in 1807–1808 (Klaproth 1812, 1814). Like Güldenstädt, whose work he edited and published, Klaproth was on a mission from the Russian Academy of Sciences, but his stay in the Caucasus region lasted little over a year, and he did not visit Daghestan, due to the anti-Russian attitude of the population. Unlike his predecessor, Klaproth was a philologist by training, and was acquainted with Oriental as well as Western and classical languages. In addition to comparative word-lists (expanded

3. See the appreciations of Güldenstädt's descriptive and classificatory work by Javaxišvili (1937: 13–25), Klimov (1969: 97) and Čikobava (1965: 101–115)

4. It also worth pointing out that Güldenstädt's classification was achieved over a decade before William Jones' celebrated discourse on the relationship of Indo-European languages!

to over 400 items),[5] Klaproth obtained "language samples" (*Sprachproben*), consisting in sentences or mini-narratives (e.g., "Die Mutter küsst ihre Kinder; sie hat viel Milch in den Brüsten; ihr Mann liebt sie"), accompanied by interlinear glosses and grammatical commentaries.

Klaproth's expanded data-collection methods and the interpretations he imposed on his findings were consistent with the theories of language origins proposed by some of his contemporaries, such as Lorenzo Hervás y Panduro (Hervás 1784, 1787a, b; Haßler 2004), and also the criticism directed at the monumental *Linguarum Totius Orbis Vocabularia comparativa* (published under Pallasís editorship in St. Petersburg, 1787–1789), which incorporated Güldenstädt's Caucasian work,[6] Klaproth's *philologie ethnographique*, as he once labeled his research (Tintemann 2004: 118), continued the fundamentally historical and ethnological orientation of language surveys since Leibniz. The primary goal of collecting language data from all corners of the goal was the reconstruction of the remote past of human societies, especially those societies for which written historical documentation was insufficient or nonexistent. Like many of his European contemporaries, Klaproth founded his chronology of early human history on the Old Testament, albeit with the historical traditions of non-Judeo-Christian civilizations brought in for corroboration, and to assist in the separation of truth from legend. The Biblical account of the Tower of Babel, which the Jesuit Hervás (1735–1809) accepted at face value, struck Klaproth as a mythical explanation of language diversity rather than a historical fact. The story of the great flood, on the other hand, bore significant resemblances to Chinese and Indian accounts of a world-wide deluge; furthermore, the chronologies matched, with the Biblical, Chinese and Hindu sources converging on the 31st century B.C. (Klaproth 1831: 19–29). As a consequence, Klaproth distinguished between antediluvian and postdiluvian linguistic kinship (*Sprachverwandschaft*). The primordial common human language (*Ursprache*) came into being before the Flood. Vestiges of the *Ursprache* subsisted in the form of sporadic lexical resemblances among widely-separated languages (Klaproth 1831: 31–39). When rising floodwaters covered the surface of the earth in 3076 B.C., according to Klaproth's calculations, some people managed to find refuge in high mountain ranges, such as the Himalayas and Caucasus. After the waters retreated, the survivors came down and repopulated the lowland areas. The ancestral languages, from which the diverse groups of present-day speech varieties are derived, existed in the

5. One is surprised to find on these word lists several body part names which Klaproth discreetly glosses in Latin rather than German (*penis, testiculus, cunnus, culus*). Since Soviet Caucasologists tended toward an even greater prudishness in their lexicographic work, these are to my knowledge the only published data on such terms for many languages in Klaproth's corpus.

6. On critical reception of the Pallas compilation, see Adelung 1815, Kaltz 2004.

period immediately following the Flood. Languages with a common postdiluvian ancestor bear the marks of their particular "stem-relationship" (*Stammverwandschaft;* Klaproth 1831: 40). In his *Asia polyglotta,* Klaproth enumerated twenty-three groups of languages — and by extrapolation, of peoples — including two from the Caucasus: the Georgians (Klaproth 1831: 109–124), and the 'Caucasians' (124–138), by which term he designates speakers of the three groups of indigenous North Caucasian languages recognized by Güldenstädt.

Another important difference between Klaproth's approach and those of his predecessors is the significance accorded to grammatical structure in the classification of languages, as opposed to simple lexical comparison. In this respect, Klaproth's method conformed to that proposed by Hervás, according to whom a language's *artificio grammaticale* (morphology and syntax) provided more reliable evidence of deep genetic relationships than its lexicon, since words can be borrowed more easily than grammatical features (Haßler 2004).[7] Historians of linguistics rightly emphasize the significance of the introduction of grammatical evidence to the process of language classification, pointing to the leading role of morphological comparison in Sámuel Gyarmathi's (1751–1830) demonstration of the affinity of Finno-Ugric languages as a landmark in late–18th century historical linguistics (Pedersen 1983: 34). The first attempts to apply the new methodology to Caucasian data, however, provided less than edifying results. At the time he wrote his encyclopedic multi-volume *Idea dell'Universo*, Hervás had data on only two Caucasian languages, both from the Kartvelian family. He had access to Paolini and Irachi's 1629 dictionary of Georgian, and also information on Laz collected by Jan Potocki (1761–1815) a few years earlier in Turkey (cf. Potocki 1829). Granted that the data were of less than optimal quality, and some words were so badly mistranscribed as to be uninterpretable, one cannot help be dismayed by Hervás's determination that the Xopa dialect of Laz was unrelated to Georgian, despite the large number of Georgian 'borrowings' in its vocabulary (Hervás 1787a: 66–71). On the other hand, some coincidental resemblances between inaccurately-rendered declensional paradigms of Georgian and Zend-Avestan convinced Hervás that "non è inverisimile, che il Zend sia dialetto Ibero di qualche provincia vicina alla Giorgia" (ibid., 74–75). Klaproth, of course, had far superior data from a fuller

7. This distinction is in keeping with the belief, enunciated some decades earlier by the scholar-statesman A. R. Turgot (1756), that ALL languages bore the traces of contact between speech communities: "Tous les peuples de la terre se sont mêlés en tant de manières différentes & le mélange des langues est une suite si nécessaire du mélange des peuples".

range of languages at hand. Nonetheless, most of his attempts to improve on Güldenstädt's original classification appear to modern readers as improbable.[8]

With respect to the peoples of the Caucasus, Klaproth's ethnohistorical investigations led him to posit a connection between the Avars of Daghestan and the tribal coalition of the same name which established an empire in the middle Danube region in the 6th–8th centuries. He traced their common origin eastward via Hunnic and some of the newly-described Uralic and Altaic languages of Siberia (Ostyak, Samoyed and Tungus), a connection that few if any linguists would now consider seriously (Klaproth 1814b: 11–25).[9] His treatment of Circassian is even odder by modern standards: He produced lexical evidence that it might belong to a common stock with the Ugric languages Vogul and Ostyak (Klaproth 1814b: 228–229), while denying that that Circassian was related to Abaza by anything deeper than lexical borrowings (Klaproth 1814b: 251). Whereas the North Caucasian peoples are indigenous to the region, with distant kin in Siberia, the Georgians, according to Klaproth, originated in the Pambak mountains of Armenia, whence they moved northward to their present homeland after the Flood (Klaproth 1831: 109).[10]

In fairness to Klaproth, it should be pointed out that in later work, including his celebrated linguistic compendium *Asia polyglotta*, he reverted to Güldenstädt's four-family classification, with the Circassians and Abkhaz-Abazas reunited in a West-Caucasian group (Klaproth 1831: 109–133; cf. Klaproth 1827: 55).[11] One also finds in the pages of *Asia polyglotta* the early glimmerings of hypotheses that will be proposed on more substantial grounds by Caucasologists in future decades. With regard to the 'Mizdschegian' (i.e., Nakh) languages, Klaproth claimed to detect numerous similarities between them and the Daghestanian languages, especially Lezgi, Lak and Avar (1831: 129); the Nakh-Daghestanian genetic grouping has now gained general acceptance among linguists. Klaproth also claimed to detect, behind the numerous differences separating the three groups of North

8. In the opinions of of Javaxišvili (1937: 29) and Čikobava (1965: 124–129), Klaproth's contribution to Caucasian linguistics represented only a slight advance beyond Güldenstädt's, and in certain respects, even a step backward.

9. With regard to the linguistic evidence purportedly linking the Caucasian Avars with the Huns, see also Klaproth (1826: 372–378).

10. Pictet (1859: 67–74) however interpreted Klaproth's evidence to rule out autochthonous origins for the North Caucasian peoples as well as the Georgians. In his view, backed up with improbable or outright faulty toponymic etymologies, ancient Celtic tribes were the first inhabitants of the Caucasus.

11. Through the later Klaproth the Güldenstädt classification came to the awareness of other contemporary scholars writing on the Caucasus, such as Bodenstedt (1848).

Caucasian languages, 'a certain family resemblance and points of contact' ("eine gewisse Familienähnlichkeit und Berührungspunkte" [p. 133]). This may be the earliest modern manifestation of a genetic grouping akin to Trubetzkoy's North-Caucasian family made by someone with first-hand knowledge of the languages.

For more than a century after Strahlenberg, European scholars' awareness of the Caucasian languages was almost exclusively based on word-lists and short Sprachproben. It was not until the 1830s and '40s that the first complete grammars of the North Caucasian languages were written. Among the pioneers were Shora Noghma and Karapet Qaramanian, who compiled grammars of languages they spoke natively (Kabardian (East Circassian) and Udi, respectively; Čikobava 1965: 130–131). In 1846, Leonti Ljul´e published a Russian-French-Circassian dictionary to which a 26-page grammatical sketch was appended. Like the early Klaproth, he regarded Circassian as a linguistic isolate, unrelated to any other language, including Abkhaz-Abaza (Javaxišvili 1937: 30–31). Meanwhile, work on the Georgian language was entering a new phase, due almost entirely to the initiative of the gifted French Orientalist Marie-Félicité Brosset (1802–1880). Brosset is best known for the scholarly editions and translations of the medieval Georgian chronicles and other important historical and literary works, which he produced while in the service of the Russian Academy of Sciences. His specifically linguistic work began in the 1830s, when he was still living in Paris. Brosset had already undertaken the study of Georgian when he was entrusted with the completion of a dictionary and grammar begun by Klaproth, but left incomplete at his death in 1835 (Dodašvili 1962: 43–54). Brosset drew upon his knowledge of the Georgian literary language, but for the most part he followed the traditional, Greek-based paradigm of the Georgian grammars of Francisco-Maria Maggio (1643) and Catholicos Anton I (1767).

While working on Georgian and its sister languages, Klaproth came to the conclusion that, whereas Kartvelian manifested 'many similarities with Indo-Germanic and other, especially North Asian, languages, it is nonethless to be considered a separate language family, distinct from all known dialects in its [lexical] roots as well as in its grammar' (1831: 111). Brosset however believed the similarities with Indo-European were more extensive than Klaproth realized. In the conclusion to his 1834 grammar of Georgian, Brosset declared that the number of phonetic similarities between Georgian lexical roots, case-marking suffixes and pronouns and those of Sanskrit, Old Persian and Zend (Avestan) was sufficient to assign it not only to Indo-European, but more specifically to the Indo-Iranian branch (Čikobava 1965: 138–139).[12] Little over a decade later, the Indo-

12. Although Leibniz detected superficial resemblances between nine words found in Paolini and Irbachi's Georgian dictionary of 1629 — many of which were inaccurately transcribed, to

European affiliation of Georgian was endorsed by no less an authority than Franz Bopp (1791–1867), whose attention was drawn by resemblances in inflectional morphology, such as the Georgian and Laz-Mingrelian 3rd pl.-subject suffix *-n* (cf. Sanskrit *-nti;* Bopp [2]1857: 304–305; see further Bopp 1846, 1847 [1842]) and perceived homologies in passive formation (Bopp 1861: 83–84). Brosset subsequently criticized some of Bopp's interpretations of the Kartvelian data used in his comparisons, but in several instances Brosset himself did no better. Despite his practical knowledge of the language, he continued to view Georgian grammar through the polarizing lenses of Greek grammatical categories. For example, Brosset took Bopp to task for segmenting an accusative case ending *-n* from the Georgian 3rd-person ergative pronouns *ma-n, ima-n,* etc. (Čikobava 1965: 166). But Bopp's misinterpretation becomes more understandable when one considers that Brosset and the other grammarians Bopp relied upon, being unable to reconcile the syntactic function of the Georgian ergative markers with Greek or Latin case roles, described them as demonstratives which could in principle be used in any case (Čikobava 1965: 135).[13]

3. *The first modern grammars of Caucasian languages*

Although the gifted linguist and Orientalist Anton Schiefner (1817–1879) never visited the Caucasus, he published grammars of three indigenous languages — Tsova-Tush, Avar and Udi — in the years 1856–1863, based on texts collected by Brosset and others, and consultations with native speakers resident in St. Petersburg (Javaxišvili 1937: 32–33).[14] The lack of direct contact with North Caucasian speech communities did not, however, hinder Schiefner from achieving insight into features of these languages which had baffled his predecessors, or entirely escaped their attention. His *Versuch über die Thusch-Sprache,* on the Tsova-Tush or Batsbi language (a close relative of Chechen and Ingush) is, in Čikobava's enthusiastic evaluation, the first grammar of *any* Caucasian language, including Georgian, based on sound scientific principles (1965: 168–185; cf. the positive as-

the point of unrecognizability — and their Greek equivalents as early as 1695 (Leibniz 1989a [1768]), Brosset seems to have been the first to present a plausible case for the inclusion of Georgian in the Indo-European family. Brosset's classification of Georgian as an Indo-Iranian language found an echo in the writings of at least one contemporary author: D'Istria (1860: 305–306) sets her description of Georgian women in a chapter entitled "Les Iraniennes".

13. The classification of Kartvelian ergative markers as demonstratives or definite articles would be maintained by Georgian grammarians for another half-century. It was not until 1896 that Schuchardt correctly described the function of the Kartvelian ergative case.

14. According to W. Schulze (p.c.) this is less true of Schiefner's Udi grammar, which drew heavily on unidiomatic texts translated from Russian.

sessment by Javaxišvili 1937: 32–34). Among Schiefner's achievements was the identification of the ergative as a distinct case (which he labeled "instructiv") and the accurate description of its functions (1854).[15] In addition to his own work, Schiefner fostered the research of Peter Uslar (1816–1875), who, unlike Schiefner, collected his linguistic data in the Caucasus. He was also the first researcher to acquire a familiarity with the grammatical structure as well as lexicon of languages from all three indigenous families.

Uslar initially came to the region as an officer in the Russian army, and in the Caucasian wars of the late 1830s fought against the very tribes whose languages he would later study. His linguistic work began in 1858, when he was commissioned by the Russian authorities to compile a history of the Caucasus. Uslar, as did many scholars before him, saw languages as tantamount to historical documents, in that linguistic data could provide clues to the classification of ethnic groups in families (Klimov 1969: 98). Each of his grammatical sketches was published under the heading "Ethnography of the Caucasus: Linguistics" (*Ètnografija Kavkaza. Jazykoznanie*), but it should be recalled that Uslar's 'ethnography', like Klaproth's 'philologie ethnographique', was a specifically *historical* social science, as it would remain through the Soviet period. Following in Schiefner's footsteps, he collected detailed morphological and syntactic data from the native informants he consulted, and he developed practical methods for improving the accuracy of phonological transcription.[16] Uslar set about his task with a zeal and energy that would have been called Stakhanovite in later times. In the decade from 1861–1871, Uslar completed six monographic studies, consisting in grammars of up to 600 pages in length of Abkhaz, Chechen and four Daghestanian languages. During the same period, Uslar read up on Kartvelian linguistics, and did some fieldwork on Svan (Čikobava 1955b, 1965: 190–191). Intensive fieldwork on so many languages of very different structure in so short a time had its drawbacks, to be sure, and, in letters to Schiefner, Uslar complained of forgetting the details of languages he had once worked on after he began the study of others (Čikobava 1965: 193). For all of that, Uslar's descriptive work, along with Schiefner's, made the unwritten

15. Soon afterwards, Schiefner's description of the Tsova-Tush "instructive" and its counterpart in the Lezgian languages came to the attention of Hans Conon von der Gabelentz (1807–1874), one of the first scholars to describe the morphosyntactic phenomenon which was subsequently to be called 'ergativity' (1860: 473, 543–544).

16. One key innovation employed by Uslar was the collection of sets of minimal pairs for hard-to-distinguish phonemes, which could later be used to verify his transcriptions with informants. Klimov (1969: 22, 99) wondered if this might indicate that Uslar was close to understanding the concept of the phoneme (see also Imart 1968), whereas Čikobava rather grumpily dismissed Uslar's technique as a crutch to compensate for poor phonetic skills (1965: 195–6).

languages of the North Caucasus known to the linguistic world. A century later, Uslar's "amazingly accurate and complete descriptions of Abkhaz, Chechen, Avar, Lak, Dargwa and Lezgian remain standard reference works" (Kuipers 1963: 318; cf. van den Berg 2005: 147).

Uslar's hands-on acquaintance with nearly the full range of Caucasian languages gave him a perspective on their genetic grouping that none of his predecessors could lay claim to. During the word-list period, proposed classifications seemed to have been conditioned for the most part by the corpus of language data the analyst had on hand, his degree of interest in historical ethnology (such as Rasmus Rask's 'Scythian' hypothesis),[17] and personal temperament.[18] Güldenstädt the naturalist, who was clearly more comfortable classifying the flora and fauna encountered during his travels, did not venture beyond the linguistic groupings warranted by the surface appearances of his data. Klaproth the philologist, who took a great interest in the history of the regions he visited (e.g., Klaproth 1827), was more open to what would now be called 'long-range' linguistics, and — given the presuppositions with which he operated — long-range ethnology. Beginning with Uslar a new and more powerful method for Caucasian comparative linguistics became available: typologically-informed classification, drawing upon a familiarity with languages — their phonology, morphology and syntax, along with knowledge about the culture and history of their speakers — rather than mere lists of more-or-less accurately transcribed lexemes.[19] In an 1864 letter, written in the midst of his most active period of fieldwork, Uslar claimed to detect a deep unity among the languages he was studying:

> Now it can be said with conviction, that to the great families of the Old World: the Indo-European, Semitic, Cushitic (Coptic, Ethiopian) and Ural-Altaic, another, completely independent one can be added, the family of Caucasian languages,

17. Drawing upon Klaproth and Adelung, among other authorities, Rask (1826: 69–70) grouped the Caucasian languages as a whole in a far-ranging "Scythian" family, which also included Samoyedic and other languages of Northern Asian, and even North America (ibid., p. 79). "In the most ancient times", the Scythians "were more widely spread than any other human race on earth" (p. 69).

18. Catherine the Great herself dabbled in lexical comparison during her idle moments, as she admitted in a letter quoted by Adelung (1815: 40): "J'ai fait un régistre de deux à trois cents mots radicaux de la langue Russe […]. Tous les jours je prenois un de ces mots et je l'écrivois dans toutes les langues que je pouvois ramasser. Ceci m'a appris que le *Celte* ressemble à l'*Ostiaque* …".

19. Of course, the opening of this new path by no means closed off the older one. Attempts to classify all or some languages of the Caucasus on the basis of lexical look-alikes picked out from dictionaries and word-lists continues to be practiced to the present day.

> since, despite their astonishing diversity, all of these languages present deep related features [glubokija rodstvennyja čerty]. Armenian is Indo-European; Georgian, clearly, is a Caucasian language, indeed, by all appearances, the most remarkable one in the entire family. (Uslar 1888: 35; translations and comments by Javaxišvili 1937: 40, Klimov 1969: 63, Čikobava 1965: 205).

For the first time, a hypothesis of pan-Caucasian linguistic unity emerged from the pen of a reputable expert possessing a solid command of the primary data. Čikobava frequently cited this letter by Uslar as a forerunner of his Ibero-Caucasian proposal. Less often cited, however, are letters written a few years later, which shows that Uslar was already having serious doubts that the Caucasian languages were in fact genetically related. In a letter dated 1870, Uslar referred to West-Caucasian, East-Caucasian and Georgian [Kartvelian] as distinct language groups. Regarding the last-named, the group he knew the least well, he wondered if it was intermediate between the two others, or perhaps a completely unrelated family (Čikobava 1965: 205–6). In another letter written two years later, he expressed the belief that the North Caucasian languages represented either "a separate family or even several separate families ["osoboe semejstvo ili daže neskol´ko osobyx″ semejstv″]" (Uslar 1888: 49; Klimov 1986a: 109)

After Uslar's meteoric career, there was little significant fieldwork in the North Caucasus until the German linguist and ethnographer Adolf Dirr (1867–1930) come on the scene in the decade preceding World War I (Öhrig 2000). During this period Dirr produced monographic studies of seven Daghestanian languages (Udi, Tabasaran, Andi, Aghul, Archi, Rutul and Tsakhur); he later added a grammar of Ubykh accompanied by a collection of texts. Dirr could be said to have completed the first round of grammatical descriptions of the North Caucasus, begun some 60 years earlier by Noghma and Qaramanian (Čikobava 1965: 274–289). In 1928 he published the first overview of Caucasian linguistics to be fully informed by research on the grammars as well as lexica of these languages. The Caucasian languages were presented in three groups, following the by-then accepted classification into (North)-West, (North)-East and South Caucasian families, with the second of these divided into 'Chechen' [= Nakh] and 'Lezgian' [= Daghestanian] subfamilies. As for deeper relations among the three families, Dirr hesitated between common origin and convergence as an explanation for features shared by many or all languages of the region. He believed it would be premature to choose between the two scenarios, since Caucasologists 'had not yet dug deep enough to be able to say if all three [families] have a common root-stock ["einen gemeinsamen Wurzelstock"], or rather that three roots had grown together to the point of unrecognizability' (Dirr 1928: 1).

Meanwhile, Klaproth's separation of the Georgians and their Kartvelian languages from the North Caucasian peoples and languages was echoed by the

classificatory schemes proposed by the linguists Max Müller (1823–1900) of Oxford and Friedrich Müller (1834–1898) of Vienna, neither of whom had any first-hand experience to speak of with Caucasian languages. Max Müller opined in 1854 that the Caucasian languages were "outstanding and degenerated colonies of the Turanian family of speech" (M. Müller 1854: 113), a group comprising essentially the same languages as the Ural-Altaic mega-family proposed by more recent scholars. Kartvelian, which Müller knew from Brosset's and Rosen's work, struck him as sufficiently different from its northern neighbors to be considered a comparatively recent arrival in the region (M. Müller 1854: 113–121). In his momumental *Grundriss der Sprachwissenschaft,* Friedrich Müller presented grammatical sketches of nearly a dozen Caucasian languages. He characterized the Kartvelian languages as comprising a "language stock" (Sprachstamm), since they were almost as closely related to one another as dialects of a single language (F. Müller 1887: 216). The North Caucasian languages as a group showed much less cohesion, although they might, in Müller's opinion, constitute a single family (1887: 48).[20] As for a deeper kinship between North and South Caucasian, Müller abstained from any definitive conclusion, since 'one could adduce as much support for the relatedness as for the non-relatedness of the two language groups' (Müller 1887: 222).

After Bopp's flirtation with Georgian, mainstream West European linguistics, principally occupied with Indo-European comparative and historical work, took little sustained interest in the indigenous Caucasian languages. The advocates of methodological reform known as the Neogrammarians likewise took no particular notice of Caucasian languages. Before closing this section, a few words are in order concerning Hugo Schuchardt (1842–1927). Known to the scholarly community at large as one of the most original contributors to Romance, Creole and Basque linguistics, Schuchardt was also, in Javaxišvili's (1937: 8–9) view, the greatest Kartvelologist that never was, on the strength of a series of remarkably insightful articles published in the years 1895–1898, and Schuchardt's pioneering work on the language of the 7th-century Graz Lectionary, which had been written in an archaic dialect of Old Georgian. The most celebrated of Schuchardt's contributions to Caucasian linguistics is his paper on what would be later called the ergative construction, as expressed in all three Caucasian language families (1895). Schuchardt's work on Basque led him to the Caucasus, a hotbed of languages sharing many of the features that set Basque apart from its Indo-European

20. Within Fr. Müller's North Caucasian group, Abkhaz-Circassian and the Daghestanian languages formed distinct clusters. The status of the Nakh languages and Udi (a somewhat peripheral Daghestanian language) was uncertain. Müller adduced evidence that they might constitute a third subgroup, although the features Chechen and Udi shared with the other East Caucasian languages militated against their separation (1887: 222).

neighbors, most notably ergativity and polypersonal verbal inflection. Basque and the Caucasian languages were also well-known linguistic orphans, which inspired some speculation by Schuchardt as to their deeper relationship, though his methodological super-ego kept him from indulging in the sort of fanciful etymologizing and word comparisons churned out by many later comparativists.

4. ***The indigenization of Caucasology***

Up to this point, the protagonists in my brief history of Caucasian linguistics have come from outside of the region. The role of native speakers of Caucasian languages has so far been a minor, subsidiary one. In reality, even before the first expeditions organized by the Russian Academy of Sciences, Georgian noblemen living in exile at St. Petersburg and Moscow were producing important descriptive works on the language, geography and ethnography of their homeland far to the south. These include the Georgian grammars of Zurab Šanšovani (1737) and Catholicos Anťon I (1753, 1767; Čikobava 1965: 80–101)), the geographic description of the Georgian kingdom by Vaxušťi Bagraťioni (1745), and the encyclopedia-like *K'almasoba* of Ioane Baťonišvili (1829).

The institutional presence of Caucasian studies began with Brosset, who arrived in St. Petersburg in 1837 and taught Georgian literature and language at the Academy of Sciences and the University in 1839–42, before his appointment as director of the State Library (Dodašvili 1962: 31; Čikobava 1965: 133). The first university chair devoted to a Caucasian language was held by the lexicographer Davit Čubinašvili (1814–1891), who taught the Georgian language at St. Petersburg University from 1845. Čubinašvili was joined by the linguist and literary historian Aleksandre Cagareli (1844–1929) in 1871. Cagareli remained at the Georgian language department at St. Petersburg for over half a century, until his return to Georgia in 1922. N. Ja. Marr, whose career will be examined below, joined the Petersburg faculty in 1900 and was named dean of Oriental languages in 1911.

Although there seems to have been no explicit preference given to ethnic Georgians in Russian universities at the time — one would rather expect the opposite — the three scholars just named were all Georgians.[21] As Marr grew to prominence in the Russian, and then Soviet academic world, he drew a number of linguists into his orbit, many of whom worked on Caucasian languages. Of these, some were natives of the Caucasus and others were not, but the proportion of the former grew noticeably after the October Revolution. Two events in particular contributed to the shift in numerical dominance toward Caucasian Caucasologists. The first was the foundation of a Georgian-language university in Tbilisi

21. More precisely, Marr was half-Georgian and half-Scottish, but was born and raised in Georgia.

shortly after the Georgian Menshevik government declared independence from the Russian Empire. Javaxišvili and many other Georgian colleagues and disciples of Marr — including the nearly 80-year-old Cagareli — left Russia to take up academic positions at Tbilisi State University (Cherchi & Manning 2002). In addition to Georgians, some speakers of North-Caucasian languages pursued their careers at either the university or the Academy of Sciences in Tbilisi (Čikobava 1965: 382–387).[22] The second major factor was the Soviet policy of "indigenization" (korenizacia), which encouraged the recruitment of local cadres in the non-Russian regions of the USSR, including academic institutions. Each of the administrative units of the North Caucasus, as well as the Abkhaz ASSR (Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic) and South Ossetian AO (Autonomous Region [Oblast′]) within the Georgian SSR, had its own local institute of language, literature and history affiliated with the republic-level or union-level Academy of Sciences. As far as I can judge from the names of researchers mentioned by Čikobava (1965: 378–382), native-speaker specialists represented the large majority of productive researchers in Northwest and Northeast Caucasian linguistics at these ASSR- and AO-level institutes.

The reputation of Soviet linguistics and ethnography has been deeply stained by the excesses of Marrist Japhetidology, stadialist ethnogenesis theory, and the suffocating restrictions imposed by the regime and its official ideologues. The Soviet experience undoubtedly reinforced the conviction that any assertion, no matter how well (or poorly) supported by scientific argument, and no matter how devoid of evident ideological markings, had political implications which could, and all too often did, outweigh other considerations. Diatribes against the 'bourgeois Indo-European theory' and the Neogrammarians were a staple of Soviet linguistic publications of the Marrist period. Even after the 1950 *Pravda* "discussion" on language matters, attacks on Western structuralism appeared in scholarly writings for some time to come. Nonetheless, a sympathetic reading of the meta-theoretical reflections of scholars such as Javaxišvili, Čikobava and Čiťaia (1926, 1968) — to limit myself to the small world of Georgian Caucasology — reveals similarities to the positions of those Western linguists who objected to the doctrine of the "sound law" (Lautgesetz) as promulgated by the Neogrammarians in the later 1870s and '80s. The concept of exceptionless, mechanically regular sound change was called into question by several leading linguists of the time, including Schuchardt. Among the issues of concern to critics of the *Lautgesetz* were the degree to which regular, physiologically-conditioned sound change could be usefully separated from

22. Of twenty-eight grammars of Northeast Caucasian languages which appeared in the period 1949–1990, half were published by the Georgian Academy of Sciences, and a further two at Tbilisi State University (Schulze 2005: 329).

changes influenced by social factors, as well as the priority to be accorded regular sound correspondences over other types of historical explanation. The approach to word histories I have labeled "Schuchardtian" allows for a broader, more diversified explanatory apparatus, with cultural, social and historical knowledge added to the toolbox of diachronic phonetics (Tuite 2006).

Among the principles shared by Javaxišvili, Čikobava and like-minded Soviet colleagues with the West-European 'Schuchardtian' opposition were refusal of the strict methodological separation of synchronic and diachronic approaches to the study of language or culture; and a greater openness to historical explanations invoking social phenomena, rather than non-social mechanisms such as exceptionless sound laws. Čikobava considered it a cornerstone of his method that 'the system of a language cannot be understood without consideration of its history, since various elements of a linguistic system develop differently, and phenomena arising in diverse chronological periods can be present simultaneously in a language system' (1959: 121). The notion that grammatical components, or for that matter, beliefs, practices and implements, may be more or less 'archaic', in the sense of being more or less different from their antecedents, is a commonplace few would repudiate. It is the first part of Čikobava's statement that sets most Soviet frameworks apart from strictly Saussurean ones, that is, the assertion that the system of a language (or culture) can *only* be understood by taking its historical development into account. Marr and Klimov, two linguists whose work Čikobava subjected to astringent criticism, would have agreed with him on this point. Another point of agreement among the historical approaches of these three scholars was a preference for evolutionary or unidirectional models of change over non-evolutionary models, but with regard to other questions of historical method, there was less consensus and often sharp disagreement among Soviet scholars.

Before going further, it should be noted that the three Caucasian families are not equally amenable to analysis by the traditional neogrammarian approach. The Kartvelian languages are by far the easiest to treat etymologically. Already in the late 19th century Georg Rosen (1820–1891) and Cagareli had made considerable advances in assembling Kartvelian cognate sets, which enabled them to work out the basic sound correspondences among the four languages in the family. At present no fewer than five Kartvelian etymological dictionaries exist, beginning with the interestingly divergent reconstructions by Schmidt (1962) and Klimov (1964). Although much work remains to be done, especially in the domain of historical morphology, a very solid foundation has already been laid. The Nakh-Daghestanian family is considerably tougher, in view of its larger phonemic inventory and the far larger number of languages belonging to it. Although much comparative work has been done within subgroups of this large family, and extensive cognate sets have been assembled for Daghestanian, the establishment of sound

correspondences among the Daghestanian subgroups and Nakh is still in its early stages (Nichols 2003).

Compared to the other two groups, Abkhaz-Adyghean is "a tough nut to crack" by the standard etymological method (Colarusso 1989). Although the number of languages in the group is small, with very similar inflectional morphology, the reconstruction of Proto-Northwest Caucasian is hampered by the typological profile of these languages, radically different from those of the other Caucasian groups. Many Abkhaz-Adyghean roots consist in little more than a single consonant (Kuipers 1963). Furthermore, these are languages of the 'head-marking' type: polypersonal verbs, little or no nominal declension, possession marked by personal affixes on the head noun (Nichols 1986). Such languages "appear to lose evidence of their genetic relatedness more rapidly than dependent-marking languages" (such as Nakh-Daghestanian; Nichols 1992: 266–269). As a consequence, etymological work on Abkhaz-Adyghean must be undertaken with extreme caution, and a deep knowledge of the languages and the special problems they present.

5. *Marr's Japhetidology*

The turbulant intellectual career of Nikolaj Jakovlevič Marr (1864–1934) has been the subject of so many books, articles and academic conferences that it would be redundant to go over it in any detail here (for recent contributions, see Bertrand 2002 and Sériot 2005a). I will limit my presentation to an outline of the principal phases of Marr's activity as Caucasologist, and the evolution of his methodology. (My segmentation of Marr's career into periods is based on the chronologies reconstructed by Javaxišvili [1937: 49–77], Čikobava [1965: 327–328], and Cherchi & Manning [2002]; the names of the phases come from Čikobava.)

5.1 *Marr's Kartvelological period (1908–1916)*

Marr first made his mark as a philologist specializing in medieval Georgian and Armenian manuscripts. His work in this area is considered exemplary by specialists. In Javaxišvili's assessment, Marr's textual editions from the first decade of the 20th century brought Georgian philology up to West-European standards (1937: 10). Toward the end of this period, though, Marr returned to a topic that first caught his interest when he was still a student, namely the possibility that Georgian was related to the Semitic languages. In a series of publications, Marr proposed etymologies for Kartvelian words in which he broke them down into triconsonantal roots like those of Semitic (1910: 6–7; Cherchi & Manning 2002: 4–5). All too often, however, careful attention to sound correspondences was sacrificed in order to match Georgian or Laz roots to alleged Semitic cognates (Marr 1908). For all of that, Marr's hermeneutic method in the years leading up to the

Russian Revolution was not inherently flawed. It is perfectly respectable practice to use morphological typology and an assumed genetic relation to set the initial parameters for an etymological investigation, as long as one is willing to recalibrate, and even reject, the starting assumptions as the work progresses. It is when evaluative criteria for the resulting etymologies are slackened in the interests of saving the initial hypothesis that such an approach becomes untenable.

It was also in this early phase that Marr began to make use of the term 'Japhetic', which already had a long history of employment as a label for sets of languages or ethnic groups, in parallel with the better-known adjectives formed from the names of Noah's other sons, S(h)em and Ham. In the early 19th century 'Japhetic' was used by some scholars to denote what is now the Indo-European family (Sériot 2005b: 231–233), but Marr employed the term to denote the Kartvelian languages, which at the time he took to be the third member of the so-called 'Noetic' family alongside Hamitic and Semitic (Čikobava 1965: 341).

By 1910–1912 a shift in Marr's approach to language classification had become evident. In the 'Noetic' family tree published in Marr's grammar of Laz (1910: xxiii; 1933: 48), Georgian, Laz-Mingrelian and Svan were placed in separate branches of Japhetic, but sharing the so-called 'Son-somex' branch with Svan was a 'pre-Aryan' language, which Marr claimed was spoken in ancient Armenia.[23] Shortly afterwards, he sought to demonstrate the existence of Japhetic layers to the north as well in the form of what he took to be a Japhetic [Kartvelian] layer in Abkhaz, superimposed on a layer of northern origin (Marr 1912: 43; 1916: 69).[24] The concept of mixed language' was to be a key component in the next phase of Marr's linguistic work.

23. "Somex-" is the Georgian ethnonym for the Armenians. In one of the earliest of what was to become a torrent of increasingly phantasmagoric etymologies of tribal and ethnic names, Marr split "somex" into /son/ (= Svan) + /me(s)x/ (the name of a southern Georgian province). For more sober opinions concerning a possible Kartvelian substrate in Armenian, see Deeters (1926–1927), Vogt (1932).

24. Marr was not in the fact the first linguist to link Abkhaz to Kartvelian in one way or another. His 1912 paper was inspired by an article on the same question by Petre Č'araia (1912; Čikobava 1965: 348–352). Several decades earlier Georg Rosen saw Abkhaz as representing the oldest stage of the 'Iberian' languages, which he believed had no noun declension and a complex verb. Svan was assigned an intermediate position in Rosen's evolutionary hierarchy, and Georgian, whose noun has greater 'force', was placed at the top (Čikobava 1965: 151). The trope of Abkhaz as linguistic coelecanth, little changed from the common ancestor from which Georgian and the other Caucasian languages arose, has a long history in Caucasology, appearing in works as different as Čikobava (1959) and Gamq'relidze & Mač'avariani (1965: 373).

5.2 *Marr's Caucasological period (1916–1920)*

By 1916, Marr presented his Japhetic grouping as a family on the same level as Indo-European, Turkic or Semitic, although still related to the last of these. Membership in the family had grown to embrace the two North Caucasian groups, or, to be more accurate, the boundaries between the groups dissolved as Marr shifted his attention to demonstrating the mixed heritage of the Caucasian languages, the presence in each of them of one or another Japhetic "layer" (*sloj*), identified by a dominant phonetic feature ('sibilant', 'spirant', and the like; Čikobava 1965: 358). Despite the obvious differences with regards to methodological constraint, Marr's theory of layers echoed the proposals of well-known linguists such as Schuchardt (e.g., 1912, 1914) and Nikolaj Trubetzkoy, who questioned the adequacy of the linguistic family-tree diagram (*Stammbaum*) to capture the complexities of the history of speech communities (Leščak & Sitko 2005; Slodzian 2005).[25]

5.3 *Marr's Mediterraneanist period (1920–1923)*

A new phase in Marr's intellectual odyssey began with the appearance of a paper on 'The Japhetic Caucasus and the third ethnic element in the creation of Mediterranean culture' (Marr 1920). Marr now claimed to detect Japhetic layers in a growing number of ancient and modern languages of Southern Europe, including Etruscan, the Pelasgian substrate postulated for ancient Greek, and Basque. In this case as well, the historical scenario proposed by Marr was not in and of itself absurd nor unprecedented. Karst (1931), Bouda (1949), among others, likewise sought to link Basque to the Caucasus via an ancient European linguistic/cultural area which preceded the spread of Indo-European languages into the region. It was not the reconstruction of a "third ethnic element", neither Indo-European nor Hamito-Semitic, in the ancient Mediterranean world which undermined the credibility of Marr's theory, but rather his almost exclusive reliance on unsupported, often wildly implausible onomastic etymologies to support his arguments.[26]

25. Thirty years after Marr's death, a curious variant of the 'mixed language' explanation for the distinctive features of the languages of the Caucasus resurfaced in Voegelin & Voegelin's 1964 survey of the languages of the world. Explaining why they catalogued the Ibero-Caucasian languages in the same fascicle as pidgins and creoles, the authors speculated that "they [Caucasian languages] may still contain (or have contained) instances of pairs of languages (as A and B) in a kind of contact in a post-neolithic culture in which employers or owners (speaking A) would imitate workers (speaking B) and thereby converge or mix languages A and B to form a new language, C" (1964: 4).

26. The problem is not that toponyms and tribal names are too difficult to etymologize, it is rather that they are too *easy*: Like a child seeing animal shapes in the clouds passing overhead, the imaginative linguist or historian can read almost anything into a toponym or ethnonym. Since one rarely knows what the lexical roots of ancient tribal or place names originally meant,

5.4 *Marr's new theory of language (1923–1950)*

Marr's writings from the last decade of his life, and those of his most fervent disciples until 1950, have been frequently cited in cautionary fables about social science gone off the deep end, or of what can happen when the theorizing of a strong-willed and charismatic eccentric is fused with the official doctrine of a totalitarian state. In the mid–1920s, Japhetic went global: once a geographically-bounded language family, Japhetic was redefined as an evolutionary stage or 'system' — a term chosen by Marr to supplant the traditional concept of language family — through which any language could in principle pass in the course of its history. Hence Marr distinguished between the living Japhetic languages (the three Caucasian families plus Basque and Burushaski), the extinct ones (Elamite, Sumerian, Etruscan, Hattic, Pictish and others even less well attested), and the evidence of past Japhetic stages in languages conventionally grouped in other families (Marr 1931). Furthermore, Marr asserted that language structures were dependant on the cognitive predispositions of speech communities at different levels of socio-economic development, or, translated into Marxian terminology, that language was a component of the ideological superstructure (*nadstrojka, Überbau*) that emerges from the economic base.

The search for traces of the Japhetic system in the world's languages proceeded at a frenetic pace after Marr's 'new theory of language' was acknowledged as the only legitimate framework for Marxist linguistics. A passage from the introduction to a journal of Japhetic studies captured the giddy atmosphere of Soviet linguistics in the 1930s and '40s, as Marr and his followers

> travers[ed] all of Eurasia on Japhetic horses […] from Atlantic Iberia to Pacific Japan, Korea and China, from China to the Scythian Black Sea, and from Turco-Mongolian Central Asia to Mediterranean Italy, and then across from Ugro-Finnic cliffs, rivers, lakes and seashores to Chamito-Semitic wastelands […] Crossing continents on Japhetic horses, even on deer and dogs, camels and elephants, nowhere close to the end, indeed hardly begun; carried by ships, naturally, to Africa, Oceania and America, and further onward to perished Atlantis, to the deep-lying foundation of Mediterranean culture. (Marr 1927b: 252; translation mine: KT)

While Marr and the Marrists devoted an inordinate amount of intellectual effort to unbridled etymologizing and speculation about primitive mentality, the origin of human language and primordial phonetic elements, some linguists con-

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the etymologist is left free to compare the name to phonetically-similar material from any given language, without constraints of semantic or historical plausibility. One of my personal favorites among the etymologies of Marr's Mediterraneanist period is his identification of the /gur/ syllable in "Liguria" with Guria, the Georgian province where he was born (Marr 1927a: 56–7; Javaxišvili 1937: 66–7).

tinued to do basic research on the Caucasian languages. Jakovlev (1949) gives a summary of this work. Interestingly, in this article Jakovlev still employed the term 'Japhetic languages' with the reference it had in Marr's second phase, to denote the indigenous languages of the Caucasus as conventionally understood. The next year, a "discussion" on the state of Soviet linguistics on the pages of *Pravda* led to the denunciation of Marr (who had died fourteen years earlier) and the abandonment of Japhetidology. Stalin, advised behind the scenes by Arnold Čikobava (1985), declared *ex cathedra* that "a Marxist cannot regard language as a superstructure on the base" (Stalin 1972 [1951]). The comparative-historical method and the postulation of language families, denounced as retrograde and bourgeois during the heyday of Marrism, were once again permitted in the Soviet academy.

Seen in retrospect, most of the concepts and historical tools with which Marr operated during the various phases of his career — typologically-guided reconstruction, language mixing, substrates, class-linked speech varieties and even stadialism — were used by respected scholars before, during and after his time. The search for deep origins, and speculation about prehistoric languages, going back to the primordial speech of humankind, has occupied some of the finest minds of past generations, and continues to motivate present-day research in archaeology, human genetics, linguistics, psychology and other disciplines (cf. Sériot 2005b). What Marr lacked, and indeed denounced in the practice of others, were not only the methodological controls that linguists impose upon their reconstructions of word histories and unattested languages, but also the self-critical spirit characteristic of the best practitioners of the etymological method: the bending-over backwards to keep the interpretive process as free as possible from bias and wishful thinking (Tuite 2006).

6. *The Georgian Ibero-Caucasianists*

Addressing a 1951 special session of the Soviet Academy of Sciences devoted to Stalin's *Pravda* essay on Marxism and linguistics, Arnold Čikobava (1898–1985) proudly reported that his colleagues at the Academy's Georgian affiliate had kept their distance from the Marrist fervor that had swept through the research institutes of Leningrad and Moscow. One reason for this was the close contact that researchers at the Tbilisi Institute of Language had with the Caucasian languages that formed much of the empirical basis on which the various phases of Japhetidology were constructed. "The facts of the Ibero-Caucasian languages did not in the slightest confirm Marr's 'theory', and that could be said with a full voice" (Čikobava 1951: 171). Furthermore, despite periodic attacks from Marrist zealots that became increasingly shrill in late 1940s, linguists in Georgia persisted in their belief in the "reactionary" and "pseudoscientific" concept of "the common Iberian language of Prof. Čikobava", in contradiction to the teachings of N. Ja. Marr (Nikol´skij & Jakovlev 1949: 278).

The Georgian linguistic school in question did not, however, originate with Čikobava, although it was he who chose the name 'Ibero-Caucasian' to designate the genetic — and not merely geographical — grouping of the "Iberian" (Kartvelian) and North Caucasian languages in a single linguistic family. The methodological foundations of Ibero-Caucasian linguistics were laid out by the historian Ivane Javaxišvili (1876–1940) in a 750-page monograph on 'The original nature and relation of the Georgian and Caucasian languages', published three years after Marr's death, in 1937.

An erudite, polymathic historian with tireless energy, Javaxišvili not only participated in the foundation of Georgia's national university (Cherchi & Manning 2002), but did fundamental research in many of its historical and philological disciplines, insofar as they were related to Georgia and the Caucasus. The common motivation of Javaxišvili's interest in such diverse areas as paleography, musicology, history of agriculture and linguistics was his goal of compiling a thoroughly-researched, multifaceted history of the Georgian people from remote prehistory to the 19th century. The Georgian written corpus could take the historian back to the 5th century A.D., and the testimony of Greek and Roman sources went back several more centuries, but any investigation further back in time had to rely on the nontextual evidence provided by archaeology, physical anthropology and linguistics. Like Marr, Klaproth, Leibniz and Turgot, Javaxišvili recognized in language an exceptionally powerful tool for the exploration of deep history. For the first edition of his five-volume *History of the Georgian People*, Javaxišvili relied on an early version of Marr's Japhetic theory, but by the time he began preparing a revised edition, he had serious misgivings about the directions in which Marr's research was going. In 1923, Javaxišvili started work on his own study of the origins of the Georgian language, intended to be the second of three introductory volumes to his *History of the Georgian People*.[27] Javaxišvili shared Marr's belief that the three Caucasian language families were genetically related to each other, as well as to several extinct languages of the ancient Near East. But as a historian, and in particular one who sought to place Georgian historiography on a solid methodological footing, Javaxišvili found Marr's etymologizing unacceptable. In his book, Javaxišvili returned to the traditional comparative approach in which special attention was paid to elements occurring in small paradigmatic sets, such as personal pronouns and inflectional morphemes. In his etymological work, Javaxišvili did not stray far from the bounds of the accepted methodology of his day, and he drew upon almost the entire corpus of work in Caucasian linguistics available in the 1920s and '30s.

27. The first volume appeared as Javaxišvili (1950); the final volume, which was to contain a reconstruction of the common ancestral culture of the Caucasian peoples, was never completed.

The most original aspect of Javaxišvili's attempt to prove the relatedness of the Caucasian languages was his sophisticated demonstration that the Kartvelian languages once had a category of grammatical gender (or nominal class) structured in the same way, and marked by similar prefixes, as that which characterizes most of the Northeast Caucasian languages (Javaxišvili 1937: 172–257). For example, Javaxišvili claimed to isolate a masculine-gender prefix /v-/ in ten Georgian words designating male humans or animals, such as ***važ***- "boy", ***vac***- "male goat", ***verdz***- "ram"; a feminine-gender prefix /n-/ in such words as Georgian ***nezv***- "female goat" and Laz-Mingrelian ***nusa*** "son's or brother's wife"; and a prefix /b-/ denoting immature humans and animals in Georgian ***bič***'- "boy", ***baťk'an*** "lamb", and so forth.[28] Furthermore, for several nouns in which Javaxišvili detected a frozen gender prefix, he produced other words which appeared to contain the same root (e.g., ***ba(v)-šv***- "child", allegedly derived from *šv*- "give birth"). The ultimate goal of Javaxišvili's etymologies was to prove not only that Kartvelian nominal stems were once marked for gender, but also that the markers were closely similar to the gender-agreement prefixes of the Northeast Caucasian family, for which a four-gender system has been reconstructed (**w*- = male rational; **r-/y*- = female rational and some inanimates; **b*- = animates and some inanimates; **d*- = all other nouns; see Schulze 1992, 1998; Nichols 2003).

On the basis of 44 etymologies such as those cited above, alongside evidence pointing toward frozen gender affixes in Kartvelian pronouns and verbal agreement markers, Javaxišvili believed he had taken the first step toward a conclusive demonstration that the Kartvelian, Abkhaz-Adyghean and Nakh-Daghestanian languages descended from a common ancestor, and therefore that 'the distant forebears of the Georgian, Sinds [= Abkhaz-Adygheans], Nakhs, Daghestanians and [Caucasian] Albanians were closely-related tribes ("ɣvidzli modzme ťomebi" [Javaxišvili 1937: 622]). The next step was to have been a volume on the culture of those distant forebears, containing an analysis of the common lexical fund of the autochthonous Caucasian languages, that is, the beginnings of a Common Caucasian etymological dictionary. Javaxišvili died in 1940, before he could start work on this project. In the nearly seventy years since Javaxišvili's treatise appeared, no one else has produced such a dictionary, nor does one seem likely to appear.

In a 1942 paper the Norwegian Caucasologist Hans Vogt (1903–1986) declared himself convinced by Javaxišvili's etymological demonstration that Kartvelian once

28. Somewhat detracting from Javaxišvili's demonstration is the likelihood that some of his examples might not be native to Kartvelian. The noun *važ*- may represent an ancient borrowing from Nakh (cf. Chechen *vaša* 'brother'); the kinterm *nusa*, attested in several North Caucasian languages as well, is almost certainly from an Indo-European source (Deeters 1955; Tuite & Schulze 1998).

had class prefixes, which he interpreted as strong evidence of the common origin of the three Caucasian language families. The very year Vogt's review appeared, however, research on the Ibero-Caucasian hypothesis was already going down a somewhat different path. After Javaxišvili's death, work on comparative Caucasian linguistics was taken up by Čikobava and a group of Georgian colleagues, including V. Topuria, G. Rogava and K. Lomtatidze. While agreeing with Javaxišvili that the ancestor of the Kartvelian languages had a morphological category of gender, Čikobava (1942) argued that the original Ibero-Caucasian gender system distinguished only two classes of nominals, human versus non-human. The former was marked by **w-*, whereas the non-human or "thing" (*nivti*) class became associated with a multitude of prefixes in the daughter languages: *s-*, *n-*, *d-*, *r-*, *j-*, *b-* (Čikobava 1959: 134–141, 1979: 118–133; Lomtatidze 1954: 76–77). Čikobava and his colleagues produced a handful of Kartvelian noun and verb stems claimed to contain frozen class markers (e.g., **datw-* "bear" and **tes-* "sow" < **de-s-*, from which the non-human prefix *d- was isolated; Rogava 1952, 1954),[29] but their most significant claim was that many Kartvelian inflectional and derivational affixes arose from prehistoric gender morphemes. Most of the Georgian and Laz-Mingrelian 3rd-person singular and plural agreement suffixes were traced back to the non-human prefixes, which would have undergone a change of position as well as meaning. The Kartvelian agentive (*m-*) and passive (*s-*) participial formants were derived from ancient human and non-human gender markers respectively (Čikobava 1953a, 1954, 1989; Andɣuladze 1968). Besides gender affixes, other features were sufficiently widespread among the Ibero-Caucasian languages to enable reconstruction of the typological profile of their common ancestor. In Čikobava's view, ancient Ibero-Caucasian had a sound system with 3-way oppositions of occlusives and paired sets of fricatives; agglutinative morphophonology; prefixes rather than suffixes; and ergative-absolutive alignment of case marking and gender agreement (Čikobava 1970: 52).

In terms of methodology, the Georgian Ibero-Caucasianists chose neither the path of Marrist linguistic paleontology, which denied altogether the existence of language families, nor that of the 'formal-mechanical' Neogrammarian approach (Čikobava 1955: 70; cf. Čikobava 1945), based on work with Indo-European languages, following instead a third path which took account of the distinctive topography of the Caucasian linguistic landscape. While rejecting the excesses of Marrism, Čikobava and his colleagues retained the notion of language mixing, in the form of grammatical and phonetic components borrowed by speech communities

29. Some etymologies of this type were contested by Gudava (1964), who argued for a simpler and more straightforward phonetic explanation (cf. C'ereteli 1965: 010).

from their neighbors (Čikobava 1948).[30] As a consequence, the sound correspondences between cognate forms, so critical for the traditional comparative method, are less regular in the Ibero-Caucasian languages, due to their complicated histories of contact and borrowing (Lomtatidze 1955: 80–81; criticism by Gamq'relidze 1971: 25–26). It was considered entirely appropriate to use features and patterns from other Caucasian families in the description of a given language, especially at earlier chronological levels.[31] Hence, comparative linguistic work in the Caucasus must be guided by deep, hands-on experience with the languages of the region, and intimate knowledge of the histories of their associated speech communities. The one-size-fits-all Neogrammarian methodology cannot be employed without taking local circumstances into account.[32]

A handful of candidates for pan-Caucasian cognates were proposed in the 1940s and '50s, notably by Ketevan Lomtatidze (1954; cf. Kuipers 1963, Čikobava 1953b), but in subsequent decades few new etymologies or other forms of support for the Ibero-Caucasian hypothesis were forthcoming from the Tbilisi team.[33] Čikobava continued to publish articles every few years reasserting his claim that Kartvelian was related to the two North Caucasian families, but with little in the way of new arguments; the same etymologies from the 1950s or earlier were produced again and again. Meanwhile, scepticism about the claims and linguistic methods of Čikobava and his co-workers appeared in Soviet linguistics publications. Specialists of the ancient Near East expressed strong reservations about the so-called 'Hetto-Iberian' hypothesis put forward by Čikobava and some Georgian historians, according to which nearly all of the linguistic isolates of the Near East, Anatolia and the Mediterranean basin would be included in a large genetic grouping alongside Ibero-Caucasian (Kakabadze 1955; K itogam 1956). In essence, this proposal echoed Marr's 'Mediterraneanist' version of Japhetic, and Karst's 'Ibero-

30. A well-known instance of the mixed-language analysis is T. Šaradzenidze's (1955) attribution of particular features of Svan nominal declension to Adyghe influence (cf. Janašia 1942; Klimov 1986b).

31. Schulze claims that several Soviet-period grammars of (North)east Caucasian languages were informed by the linguistic doctrine of "Chikobavaism […] according to which all grammars for Caucasian languages have to start from the paradigm, or étalon, of Georgian" (2005: 346). If this was indeed the case, it would have been yet another consequence of the presupposition of Ibero-Caucasian genetic unity.

32. With regard to the Abkhaz-Adyghean languages, even Western experts acknowledge the difficulties their distinctive structures present for traditional comparative approaches, as was mentioned above.

33. Nodar Andyuladze's (1968) book on the evolution of person-marking affixes from class prefixes was a notable exception.

Alarodian' speculations, albeit with different arguments and in the guise of a traditionally structured linguistic family.[34] At the same time, one cannot help but notice a serious questioning of the methodological grounds upon which Ibero-Caucasian itself was constructed in Bokarev's (1954) pointed criticism of the 'Hetto-Iberian' hypothesis; Bokarev's remarks carried all the more weight due to his reputation as one of the foremost specialists of Daghestanian linguistics.

Probably the leading critic of the Ibero-Caucasian hypothesis from within the Soviet Caucasological community was Georgij Andreevič Klimov (1928–1997), who in a series of articles and monographs pointed out the lack of solid comparative-historical grounds for linking the three families genetically, and the low number of potential pan-Caucasian isoglosses, less than two dozen (Klimov 1968, 1969, 1970, 1986a). Klimov advised his colleagues to continue descriptive and etymological work within the individual families, with the aim of comparing them pairwise, rather than all three at a time.[35] Klimov's etymological dictionary of the Kartvelian languages (1964) and the reconstruction of proto-Kartvelian phonology by K. H. Schmidt (1962), both of which treated the Kartvelian languages as a separate group, rather than as a component of a larger Ibero-Caucasian group, met with Čikobava's disfavor for their 'simplistic interpretation of complex historical issues' (1965: 378, 396).

34. Setting aside the work done in the context of all-embracing theories of the 'Hetto-Iberian' type, comparisons between Caucasian language groups and the various linguistic isolates of the ancient Near East and southern Europe are of varying quality. Despite the limitations imposed by the limited corpora for these extinct languages and uncertainties concerning the pronunciation of lexemes and their meanings, certain hypotheses of relatedness look promising if not completely convincing. Although the Hattic corpus, conserved within Hittite documents, is not extensive, some striking parallels have been detected that point toward a possible genetic link to the Abkhaz-Adyghean languages (Ardzinba 1979; Dunaevskaja & D´jakonov 1979). The related Hurrian and Urartian languages once spoken in the vicinity of modern Armenia have been linked to the Caucasus since the time of their discovery. The most detailed treatment of possible Caucasian affiliations for Hurro-Urartian is Diakonoff [D´jakonov] & Starostin (1986), which contains several dozen possible isoglosses between Hurrian, Urartian and the Northeast Caucasian languages. Reviews of this work by Caucasologists have brought out reasons for scepticism about such a link (Schulze 1987, Smeets 1989), despite the scholarly authority of D´jakonov, one of the leading Soviet historians of the ancient Near East. As for Kartvelian, attempts have been made to demonstrate kinship with Sumerian (Tseretheli 1913–1916), Etruscan (Gordeziani 1980), and an apparent non-Indo-European substratal language detected in the lexicon of ancient Greek (Furnée 1979, 1982; Gordeziani 1985), although none of these proposals has drawn much support from other scholars.

35. Klimov's preliminary investigations in this area led him to consider the hypothesis of a genetic link between Kartvelian and Abkhaz-Adyghean as more promising than links of either of the two to Nakh-Daghestanian (1968). He detected forty or so possible isoglosses, including a derivational morpheme of nearly identical function and phonetic form.

Givi Mač'avariani (1917–1968) and his collaborator Tamaz Gamq'relidze (b. 1929), who argued that proto-Kartvelian morpheme structure and vowel alternations showed substantial homologies with those of proto-Indo-European, were careful to avoid any unambiguous assertion that their findings contradicted a genetic link between Kartvelian and the North Caucasian families (Gamq'relidze & Mač'avariani 1965). But Čikobava (1970), in a testy review of their book, believed that their refusal to acknowledge what he believed were the deeper and more significant structural similarities among the Ibero-Caucasian languages set them on the same slippery slope that led Bopp to link Kartvelian to Indo-European, and the early Marr to relate it to Semitic. Having chosen to view Kartvelian through an Indo-European rather than Ibero-Caucasian lens, Čikobava argued, their interpretation of the data was already biased, and would ineluctably lead them to favor genetic relatedness between Kartvelian and Indo-European.[36] Mač'avariani (1966, 1970) acknowledged that his reconstruction of proto-Kartvelian revealed an early stage that was typological similar, in some respects, to the Abkhaz-Adyghean languages, but did not attribute such structural resemblances to common genetic origin. Outside the USSR, Deeters (1955) pointed out the weaknesses in the hypothesis that all Caucasian language families once had a category of gender; and Vogt (1955), who thirteen years earlier seemed convinced by Javaxišvili's arguments for Ibero-Caucasian, expressed serious doubts that Kartvelian could be shown to be related to either North Caucasian family.

The most telling blow against the Javaxišvili-Čikobava school of Ibero-Caucasian linguistics was struck not by a well-known comparativist, but rather by Aleksandre Oniani (1986), until then primarily known as a specialist of Kartvelian historical morphology. The arguments put forth by Oniani in his nine-page *Voprosy jazykoznanija* article were neither original, nor based on data that any competent Kartvelologist would not have already been familiar with. In fact, he did not directly attack the Ibero-Caucasian hypothesis as such, but only the factual basis of what was, for the half-century since Javaxišvili's book, its main supporting pillar: the doctrine that Kartvelian once had a category of grammatical gender. What was the most devastating was the general tone of the paper, leaving

36. At least one other reader of Gamq'relidze and Mač'avariani's book, the distinguished phonologist G. Axvlediani, drew precisely this conclusion. Although himself one of the elder statesmen of Georgian Caucasology, Axvlediani hoped that the new work would usher in a paradigm shift in the field, much to Čikobava's irritation: 'Science goes forward, often by refuting itself. And we therefore should not take offense at progress […]. New methods of research have been found, and scholars have not been afraid to re-examine accepted ideas. I have in mind the ingenious work of T. Gamq'relidze and the late G. Mač'avariani […] which […] totally overturns the conception of the kinship of Georgian with the Caucasian languages and sheds an entirely new light on the proto-Kartvelian language" (Axvlediani 1968, cited by Čikobava 1970: 58).

the reader with the impression that the Kartvelian gender hypothesis was a crumbling edifice that should have been toppled decades earlier. Although, according to Oniani, opposing points of view were held for years 'not only by representatives of the school of A. Shanidze [Georgia's foremost grammarian], but in general by the majority of prominent Kartvelologists, they remained unspoken', out of deference to Čikobava or his institutional authority, one is left to assume.[37] Oniani was an interesting choice as spokesman for this silent majority. A decade earlier, in the introductory chapter of a book on person-marking affixes in the Kartvelian verb, he took aim at Čikobava's doctrine that 'a language system cannot be understood without consideration of its history', which he deemed illogical and methodologically unacceptable (Oniani 1978: 7–8). Citing Gamq'relidze & Mač'avariani (1965) and Klimov for support, Oniani made clear that his analysis would respect the Saussurean separation of synchronic and diachronic analysis that earlier generations of Soviet linguists had repudiated. After appearing in the most prominent linguistics journal of the USSR, Oniani's rebuttal of Čikobava's gender hypothesis was included in a monograph on Kartvelian comparative grammar intended for use in Georgian philology courses in the republic's pedagogical institutes (Oniani 1989). Here as well the opening chapter was given over to a discussion of linguistic methodology, and, after a presentation of Saussure's synchrony/diachrony distinction, Čikobava's 'historicism' was presented as not only illogical ('if humans evolved from monkeys, does that mean humans are monkeys?') but, worse yet, *anti*-historical (Oniani 1989: 11).[38]

7. *North Caucasian and Nostratic*

Best known as one of the founders, along with Roman Jakobson, of structural phonology, Nikolaj Trubetzkoy (1890–1938) did fieldwork in the North Caucasus in the years preceding the Russian Revolution, most intensively on the languages of Daghestan. On the basis not only of structural similarities but also a hundred possible isoglosses, Trubetzkoy proposed that Abkhaz-Adyghean and Nakh-Daghestanian were genetically related, representing two branches of a common North Caucasian language family. The Kartvelian languages were not included in this family. Of special significance in Trubetzkoy's comparative work is the evidence he assembled for regular sound correspondences between Abkhaz-Adyghean and Nakh-Daghestanian cognates, which for most linguists is a necessary step in the demonstration of relatedness. Since the typical Abkhaz-Adyghean

37. This is not entirely true; cf. the remarks by Axvlediani cited earlier, and Gamq'relidze (1971: 44).

38. Oniani's reading of Čikobava was uncharitable to the point of caricature, but if anything that underscores its significance as an ideological weather-vane, so to speak.

lexical root consists in a single syllable and often no more than a single phoneme, there is less material for comparison than in families such as Indo-European or Uralic. However Trubetzkoy succeeded in identifying over a dozen bisyllabic Abkhaz-Adyghean lexemes, for which potential Nakh-Daghestanian cognates were found (e.g., Abkhaz *məz(ə),* Adyghe *maze* "moon, month"; cf. Avar *moc̓c̓*, Agul *waz* "ditto"; Trubetzkoy 1987 [1930] #30). In Trubetzkoy's opinion, bisyllabic lexemes are of particular interest because they retain the original structure of Abkhaz-Adyghean roots, before the loss of vowels in the initial syllable led to their reduction (Trubetzkoy 1987 [1930]: 281).

Trubetzkoy's North Caucasian hypothesis was taken as the starting point for comparative research by a team of Russian linguists, most notably S. L. Nikolajev and the late Sergej Anatol'evič Starostin (1953–2005), whose 1994 *North Caucasian Etymological Dictionary* contains several hundred cognate sets which include lexemes from both Abkhaz-Adyghean and Nakh-Daghestanian. Their etymologies have been met with skepticism from specialists in Caucasian linguistics (Nichols 1997, Schulze 1997); nonetheless a considerable number of scholars regard Trubetzkoy's North Caucasian hypothesis as at least an interesting possibility worthy of further investigation, even as they consider a genetic link between the two North Caucasian groups and Kartvelian highly unlikely.[39]

As for Kartvelian, another group of Russian linguists, led by Vladislav Markovič Illič-Svityč (1934–1966) and A. B. Dolgopolsky, included it in the so-called 'Nostratic' mega-family, a genetic grouping including Indo-European, Afro-Asiatic [= Hamito-Semitic], Ural-Altaic and Dravidian (Nazarov 1974; Bomhard 1996). The principle evidence for Nostratic consists in hundreds of cognate sets, on the basis of which Nostraticists have postulated regular sound correspondences among the proto-languages which are its immediate daughters. The nature of the genetic relation between Kartvelian and the other families mentioned above was called into question by the late Joseph H. Greenberg (2000), who did not include it in his 'Eurasiatic' family (comprising Indo-European, Uralic, Altaic and some smaller Asian families), although he did not deny that Kartvelian would share a common linguistic ancestor with Eurasiatic at a more remote time depth. Building upon Greenberg's research, as well as his own revision of the Nostratic sound correspondences, Bomhard has reconstructed just such a Kartvelian-Eurasiatic branch within Nostratic, with Elamo-Dravidian and Afro-Asiatic as more distant relatives (Bomhard 1996: 22).

39. Working independently from Trubetzkoy, and often in disagreement with him, Georges Dumézil also sought to demonstrate the genetic relatedness of the two North Caucasian families, to which he later added Kartvelian and Basque, on the basis of what he believed was shared morphology (Dumézil 1933a, 1933b, 1937; cf. Trubetzkoy 1934). Lafon (1929) took a similar approach.

It is a curious fact that "whereas the Ibero-Caucasian and Euskaro-Kartvelian hypotheses have a number of adherents among Kartvelists, the Nostratic one has not met with approval among them at all" (Klimov 1991: 325), even though the groundwork for Nostratic was done in the USSR, and Kartvelian data play a key role in establishing the sound correspondences. Even at present, few Kartvelian specialists outside Georgia, and almost no one in Georgia, have gone on record as supporting any form of the Nostratic hypothesis. Čikobava and his school were of course hostile to the very idea of Nostratic, since it split Kartvelian genetically from the two North Caucasian families. Gamq'relidze & Mač'avariani (1965), as was mentioned earlier, steered clear of any explicit endorsement of either Nostratic in general, or a genetic relation between Indo-European and Kartvelian in particular, even as they leveled strong criticism at the empirical grounding of the Ibero-Caucasian hypothesis (e.g., Gamq'relidze 1971). Klimov himself walked a thin line between the Ibero-Caucasian and Nostratic camps, criticizing the first without rejecting it out of hand, while on the other hand acknowledging evidence for Indo-European-Kartvelian isoglosses, without however recognizing a genetic link between the two families.[40] As a result, Klimov came under attack from both sides: Čikobava (1970) accused him of being a Nostratic sympathizer, whereas toward the end of his life Klimov was upbraided for being unfairly critical of Nostratic (Manaster-Ramer 1995).

8. *The Ibero-Caucasian hypothesis and the historiography of Abkhazia*

The preceding account of the Ibero-Caucasian hypothesis is only part of the story. If, on the one hand, Marr and Čikobava were opposed by proponents of a uniformitarian, methodologically-rigorous and language-centered historical approach, on the other their work came under attack from historians seeking to reinterpret or even redraw the complex scenarios of contact, mixing and layering that both Marr and Čikobava regarded as characteristic of Caucasian ethnohistory. Among the presuppositions underlying criticism from this second camp are post-war Soviet ethnogenesis theory, which favored a simplistic superposition of territory, language, ethnos and nation; and the distinctive variety of 'hermeneutics of suspicion' which flourished in the Soviet intellectual ecosystem, and continues to thrive fifteen years after the break-up of the USSR. This section begins with a detour into medieval Georgian literary and historical studies, during which the Ibero-Caucasian hypothesis will fade from view temporarily, to return later on, intertwined with the thread of Soviet and post-Soviet historiographic templates.

40. Klimov attributed the existence of apparently cognate lexemes in Indo-European and Kartvelian to intensive contacts between the two speech communities at various periods (Klimov 1984, 1994).

8.1 *P'avle Ingoroq'va, Giorgi Merčule, and the 'Life of Grigol of Xandzta'*

Less than a month after Čikobava's triumphant speech at the 1951 special session of the Academy of Sciences on Stalin's contribution to linguistics, a thick manuscript by the literary historian P'avle Ingoroq'va (1893–1990) was delivered to the printers, although it would not be published until three years later. At first glance, Ingoroq'va's tome purported to be a biography of the 10th-century Georgian ecclesiastic Giorgi Merčule, best known as the author of the 'Life of Grigol of Xandzta'.[41] The latter text was written in 951, and Ingoroq'va's *Giorgi Merčule* was intended to commemorate the 1000th anniversary of the 'Life of Grigol of Xandzta', a critical edition of which Ingoroq'va published in 1949. It was to have an impact far beyond the disciplinary frontiers of Georgian medieval literary studies, however, and continues to arouse passions over a half-century after its publication. Like Čikobava, Ingoroq'va singled out Marr for criticism in the pages of his book, but his angle of attack was radically different, and the consequences for Georgian historiography were far more problematic. Ingoroq'va's name is commonly invoked in debates over the historical relation between Abkhazia and Georgia, often by partisans of one side or the other who seem not to have read more than a few excerpts from Ingoroq'va's thousand-page monograph. In order to understand how this mid–20th-century biography of a mid–10th-century biographer became the cause and object of heated argument ever since its publication, I will discuss the importance of each of its three layers, as it were: Grigol and his times, the significance of Giorgi Merčule's hagiography of Grigol, and Ingoroq'va's objectives in writing a study of Giorgi.

According to his biographer, Grigol of Xandzta was born in 759 and died at the age of 102 in 861. Although born into a prominent East Georgian noble family, Grigol was drawn to a monastic vocation. Accompanied by three companions, the young Grigol left his home province, then under Arab domination, and traveled southwestward to what is now northeastern Turkey. Grigol explored the sparsely-settled district of K'larjeti, in search of a solitary locale where he could found a monastery. He chose the remote site of Xandzta, where he and his companions built a wooden church and a simple monastic compound. In the course of time Grigol of Xandzta became archimandrite of a coalition of a dozen monasteries in the region, which were founded by him or his disciples. Grigol's monastic career overlapped, and to an extent intersected, the reigns of three rulers who were

41. Full title: "The work and career of the worthy life of our holy and blessed father Grigol the Archimandrite, builder of Xandzta and Shat'berd, and with him the commemoration of many blessed fathers" (*Šromay da moɣuac'ebay ɣirsad cxorebisay c'midisa da neťarisa mamisa čuenisa grigolisi arkimandrit'isay, xanʒtisa da šat'berdisa aɣmašenebelisay, da mis tana qsenebay mravalta mamata neťartay*). The version consulted while writing this paper is that of Abuladze et al. (1963). "Merčule" is not the family name of the author but rather a title loosely translated "specialist in [ecclesiastical] law" or perhaps "theologian" (Ingoroq'va 1954: 17–28).

to play a critical role in the struggle for the liberation of western Transcaucasia from foreign (Arab and Byzantine) hegemony, and the eventual consolidation of the united Georgian kingdom under Bagrat' III in the early 11th century: Leon II (King of Abkhazia 786–798), Ashot' Kuropalates (King of Georgia 800–826) and his son and successor Bagrat' I (826–876). Although inheritor of the Iberian kingdom in eastern Georgia, Ashot' moved his residence to Art'anuji in K'larjeti after a series of defeats by the Arab armies. It was from here that he and his sons launched their long campaign to retake southern and eastern Georgia, and it was in K'larjeti that they took an interest in and contributed financially to Grigol's ecclesiastical work.

Composed ninety years after the death of its subject, the biography of Grigol of Xandzta fell into oblivion until the mid–19th century, when a Georgian scholar came across an 11th-century copy of Giorgi Merčule's text in the library of the Jerusalem Patriarchate. Marr examined the manuscript in 1902 and published a scholarly edition nine years later. Since World War II the 'Life of Grigol of Xandzta' has been issued in several critical editions, and, in abridged and annotated form, it has become a prominent component of the Old Georgian literary canon taught in schools.[42] The popularity of this work cannot be ascribed to its literary merits alone. In a list of key themes laid out for middle-school readers of the 'Life of Grigol of Xandzta', K'. Danelia included, alongside medieval church history and monastic life, 'the self-government (autocephaly) of the Georgian church, and the cultural and political integrity (*mtlianoba*) of Georgia' (Sarǰveladze et al. 1986: 135). With regard to the status of the Orthodox Church in Georgia, Giorgi Merčule described significant moves toward autonomy from the patriarchates of Constantinople and Jerusalem, such as the securing of the right to consecrate holy oils locally rather than import them from Jerusalem. This would culminate in the removal of the Orthodox communities of western Transcaucasia — Lazica, Egrisi and Abkhazia — from subordination to Byzantium and their attachment to the Iberian Catholicosate in Mcxeta, just as the latter had earlier become autonomous from Antioch. As for the concept of Georgian national unity, while the 'Life of Grigol of Xandzta' certainly accorded important supporting roles to the kings of Iberia and Abkhazia, whose dynastic union in 1010 gave rise to the united Georgian kingdom of which the present-day Republic of Georgia considers itself the successor, it is in the domain of religion that the Georgian nation received its initial definition. In previous centuries, the proper name *Kartli* denoted a territory and feudal state in eastern Georgia, corresponding to the province still known

42. Notwithstanding the reform of the standard written language in the 19th century, even the earliest Georgian literary works are no more inaccessible to modern readers than, say, Chaucer or *Piers the Plowman* are to contemporary Anglophones.

under that name today. In words that many a Georgian schoolchild can recite from memory, Giorgi Merčule gave *Kartli* a vastly expanded denotation, as 'the spacious country within which the liturgy is celebrated and all prayers are performed in the Georgian language' ("kartlad priadi kueq'anay aɣiracxebis, romelsa-ca šina kartulita enita žami šeic'irvis da locvay q'oveli aɣesrulebis"), except for the Kyrie Eleison, which continued to be sung in Greek (Grig. Xandzt. §44). *Kartli,* and later *Sakartvelo* "the land of the Kartlians", became the name of a national community — Georgia — that now reached westward to the Black Sea coast.

This type of equation between religious affiliation and an identity one might call 'ethnic' is by no means rare, whether in Western Asia or elsewhere, and indeed 'Kartveli' continued to be in use among the Georgian population to refer to Orthodox Christians, whatever language they might speak, until the 17th century (Boeder 1994, 1998). It is very important to note that the territory where Georgian was in use as the liturgical language, especially after it replaced Greek in this function in the Abkhaz Kingdom and throughout western Georgia (a process already complete by the time the 'Life of Grigol of Xandzta' was composed; Ingoroq'va 1954: 221), comprised both the "Kingdom of the Georgians" (*kartvelta samepo*) ruled by Bagrat' I and his successors, and the "Kingdom of the Abkhazians" (*apxazta samepo*) ruled by Leon II and his successors, until both royal houses were united in the person of Bagrat' III (978–1014), who inherited the Georgian crown through his father and the Abkhazian crown through his mother.

As represented by Marr, as well as the historians Ivane Javaxišvili and Simon Janašia (1900–1947), the western provinces, which were the staging grounds for the consolidation of the Georgian kingdom, had complex histories of their own. In the introduction to his 1911 edition of the 'Life of Grigol of Xandzta', Marr characterized the history of K'larjeti as one of shifting linguistic, political and religious affiliations among the local population. The original inhabitants, in Marr's opinion, were "Tubal-Cain" (Laz-Mingrelian-speaking) tribes, which then were progressively Armenianized as Armenian hegemony extended over the region in the early medieval period. Beginning in the mid–8th century, the population of K'larjeti began taking on Georgian identity, initially due to the incursion of Georgian overlords, then subsequently through adoption of Georgian first as liturgical, then spoken language, a process aided by the Chalcedonian (i.e., Orthodox) religious affiliation of the K'larjetians. According to Marr, even in Giorgi Merčule's time Armenian remained in use as the mother tongue of a significant portion of the local inhabitants. As for Abkhazia, no one questioned the presence of ethnolinguistically Abkhazian tribes along the eastern Black Sea coast since ancient times, a belief reinforced by references in Pliny the Elder, Arrian and other Greek and Roman sources to tribes whose names contained the roots *Abasg-/Abask-* and *Apsil-/ Absil-* (cf. the modern ethnonyms *Abaza* and *Apsua*, the self-designation

of the Abkhazians).[43] Furthermore, Janašia (1940) found what he interpreted as evidence of an Abkhaz-Adyghean substrate both within the borders of modern-day Abkhazia and further south and east in what is now Georgian-speaking territory. Among the toponymic elements of Northwest Caucasian origin identified by Janašia were the suffixes *-ps-/-pš-*, meaning "water, river" and *-q'va* "valley". River names including these elements are found as far south as Guria (*Supsa*) and Ach'aria (*Ačq'va*). The hypothesis that Abkhaz-Adyghean speakers were among the ancient inhabitants of western Georgia received the support of Marr (1930) and Čikobava (1948: 263), and indeed is compatible with the supposition, expressed by Javaxišvili (1960: 401–417) and Kavtaradze (1985), that the remote linguistic ancestors of the Georgians came from further south. Beginning with the reign of Leon II in the late–8th century, the Abkhazian principality, a former vassal state of Byzantium, declared its independence, and embarked on what business writers would call a 'guppy-swallows-whale' merger. Beginning with Egrisi and Argveti, the whole of western Georgian was progressively incorporated into an expanded 'Kingdom of the Abkhazians' with its new capital in Kutaisi. After Bagrat' III inherited the thrones of both Abkhazia and (eastern) Georgia, the designation "King of the Abkhazians" was the first-named among the royal titles.[44] It would seem difficult to deny the involvement of ethnic Abkhazians in this process, even if they became a small minority in the expanded kingdom of which they were the titular nationality. The Abkhaz language was not used in writing at this time, but the epithet given to King Giorgi IV Lasha (reigned 1213–1223), son of Queen Tamar, provides a tantalizing indication of the presence of Abkhaz speakers at the royal court. According the *Kartlis cxovreba*, Lasha 'is translated 'enlightener of the world' in the language of the Apsars [= Abkhazians]' ("ganmanatlebelad soplisa itargmana apsarta enita").[45] If the historical evidence is taken cumulatively and at face value, the postulate that Abkhazian was spoken in at least the northern part of the territory now called Abkhazia for the past two millennia would be the null hypothesis. To argue otherwise would imply that the author has obtained new

43. For the classical references and attempts at identification with modern ethnolinguistic groups, see the *Real-Encyclopädie* entries on the "Abaskoi" (I: 20), "Apsilai" (II: 277) and "Heniochoi" (VIII: 259–279).

44. The official title of King Davit IV Aghmashenebeli (reigned 1089–1125) was as follows: "King of the Abkhazians, Georgians, Rans, K'axs and Armenians (*mepe apxazta, kartvelta, ranta, k'axta da somexta*), Sharvan-shah and Shah-in-shah and autocratic sovereign of all the East and West". The Rans and K'axs were inhabitants of two ancient provinces of eastern Georgia.

45. According to the most widely-accepted derivation, *laša* is related to Abkhaz *a-laśa* "light" (Charachidzé 1968: 679–680; Chirikba 1998: 44).

evidence, formulated a more elegant hypothesis, or been influenced by factors of a different nature.

Enter P'avle Ingoroq'va. Trained in St. Petersburg in the years preceding the Russian Revolution, Ingoroq'va returned to Georgia, where he was appointed to a position in the Manuscript Section of the Georgian National Museum. In the course of his uncommonly long career — Ingoroq'va died in 1990 at the age of 97 — he published important studies in the fields of medieval and 19th-century Georgian literature, paleography, poetics and hymnography. His scholarly approach to the Georgian literary classics was characterized by extensively-researched explorations into the biographies of the authors of these works, and the times and sociohistorical contexts in which they were composed. Long before the Giorgi Merčule study, Ingoroq'va wrote a lengthy essay on the early–13th century epic poem "The Knight in the Leopard's Skin" (*Vepxist'q'aosani*). This work has held the status of a national epic for centuries, and the poem's protagonists are commonly evoked as exemplars of virtues especially prized by the Georgian people, such as fidelity, valor, hospitality and eloquence. Little is known for certain about Shota Rustaveli — literally, Shota of Rustavi — the poem's self-proclaimed author, and the oldest textual traces of 'The Knight in the Leopard's Skin' are dated well over a century after its presumed composition during the reign of Queen Tamar, around the year 1200.

In 1917, Marr, who at the time was one of the foremost authorities on Old Georgian philology, stirred up a veritable scandal in Georgian intellectual circles when he published his claim that 'The Knight in the Leopard's Skin' was composed no earlier than the 14th-century, by a Muslim Georgian from the southern frontier province of Meskheti (Dzidziguri 1985: 63; Cherchi & Manning 2002). Marr's assertion was not as outlandish as it might seem: The main characters of 'The Knight in the Leopard's Skin' are depicted as being from Arabia or India, the poem's author presents the work as a translation from Persian, and specifically Christian references are conspicuously absent from the text. Needless to say, many of Marr's contemporaries found his identification of Georgia's greatest literary genius as a Muslim to be shocking and tantamount to blasphemy. Marr's essay appeared while Ingoroq'va was working on his own contribution to Rustaveli studies, a lengthy study eventually completed in 1922. Ingoroq'va did not attack Marr head-on, referring only once to the "unanticipated and incomprehensible" 1917 essay in a footnote (1963: 73), but his conclusions with regard to Rustaveli's identity represented a total rejection of Marr's arguments and a return to the traditional view, with a surprising amount of biographical detail added. Despite the paucity of hard evidence, Ingoroq'va not only placed the author at Queen Tamar's court, but went so far as to identify him with Shota III of the Hereti branch of the royal house of Bagrat'ion (Ingoroq'va 1963: 82–117), a claim few specialists would deem to

be more than thinly-supported speculation (Baramidze 1958: 32–45; K'ak'abadze 1966: 244–276).

Seen from the perspective of Ingoroq'va's earlier work, *Giorgi Merčule* looked to be cut from familiar cloth. This book abounds in detailed biographical and historical reconstructions that go far beyond the hypotheses most of his colleagues allowed themselves. But if in the earlier work Ingoroq'va insisted on the canonical Georgianness of Rustaveli in rebuttal to the more 'problematic' identity reconstructed by Marr, in his 1954 monograph it was the 'Georgianness' of the territories and populations featured in the 'Life of Grigol of Xandzta' that was in cause, and the gloves were off in his attacks on the writings of the by then long-deceased Marr.

To put it bluntly, Ingoroq'va's project in *Giorgi Merčule* consisted in the erasure of non-Georgians, or those whose Georgianness was perceived as problematic, from the historical record of Abkhazia and southwestern Georgia. To this purpose Ingoroq'va sought to demonstrate that key participants in the story of Georgian unification — the Bagrat'ion royal house, the population of K'larjeti, and the Abkhazians who lent their name to the kingdom that grew to encompass all of western Georgia — were to be identified as canonically "Georgian" all the way back to the dawn of history.

Marr's view, mentioned earlier, that the people of K'larjeti at the time of Grigol of Xandzta were Armenian speakers undergoing assimilation to Georgian identity on the basis of religion, was taken by Ingoroq'va to entail that Marr believed that 'the immediate setting of Grigol of Xandzta's activities, the province of K'larjeti, was not autochthonous Georgian land' ("ara iq'o dzireuli kartuli kveq'ana" [Ingoroq'va 1954: 409]). But in fact Marr did not deny the autochthonicity of the K'larjeti Georgians as such, but rather attributed to their ancestors a complex history of language shift and sociopolitical affiliation. Marr also underscored the critical role of religion in local conceptions of identity. For Ingoroq'va, however, hybridization of this kind had no place in the history of the territories that were to constitute the united Georgian kingdom of the 11th and 12th centuries. Marr was not merely mistaken in his interpretation of the evidence; in publishing such a claim Marr, 'it could be said, reached the summit of the distortion of historical truth' ("ist'oriuli č'ešmarit'ebis damaxinjebaši, šeidzleba itkvas, ertgvar mc'vervals miaɣc'ia" [1954: 404]). This is far from an isolated instance of such rhetoric: the terms "false" (*q'albi*), "distorted" (*damaxinjebuli*) and "erroneous" (*mcdari*) occur with disturbing frequency in the pages of *Giorgi Merčule.* The criticisms of Marr's linguistic theories going on at the same time, following Stalin's 1951 *Pravda* article, seem almost moderate by comparison.

A similar issue of hybridity had to be confronted with respect to the house of Bagrat'ion, branches of which ruled in both Georgia and Armenia. Since "many erroneous perspectives" had been expressed about their origins, Ingoroq'va

sought to set the record straight by demonstrating, with the support of onomastic etymologies of dubious quality, that the Armenian as well as Georgian branches of the Bagratids were of Georgian ancestry, descending from the Old Georgian Parnavazian dynasty (see Ingoroq'va 1954: 87–99).

The most controversial assertion made by Ingoroq'va in his 1954 book, judging by the reaction it provoked immediately after it was made known in print, and the debates it continues to set off over a half-century later, is the claim that the Abkhazians of medieval and ancient western Transcaucasia were not the same people as the contemporary Abkhazians, but rather a Georgian tribe speaking a Kartvelian language. In the author's words (p. 116):

> The territory of Abkhazia at the time of the foundation of the "Kingdom of the Abkhazians" [Ingoroq'va's scare quotes], that is, in the 8th century, was inhabited by Georgian tribes, and not only then, but throughout ancient history, Antiquity and the Middle Ages. The Abkhazians and other tribes dwelling in Abkhazia (Absilians, Misimians, Sanigians) were likewise purely Georgian tribes, of Georgian origin and speaking a Georgian [Kartvelian] dialect.

With this astonishing stroke of historical revisionism, Ingoroq'va resolved the (for him) paradoxical fact that the rulers of the 'Kingdom of the Abkhazians', as they incorporated the West Georgian territories, which hitherto had been under the hegemony of the Byzantine Empire, carried out 'a purely Georgian state policy' ("c'minda kartuli saxelmc'ipoebrivi p'oliť ik'is gaťareba" [Ingoroq'va 1954: 117]), including the replacement of Greek by Georgian as the state and liturgical language, followed by the unification of the West Georgian Orthodox dioceses with the Iberian Catholicosate in Mcxeta.

Ingoroq'va's arguments in support of his hypothesis have been picked over time and again by Georgian, Abkhazian and foreign scholars (Ančabadze 1964, 1976; Berdzenišvili 1990; Khoshtaria-Brosset 1997; Melikišvili 1959: 91), and I will not go over this debate here, except with respect to Ingoroq'va's deployment of linguistic arguments. Over forty pages of *Giorgi Merčule* are given over to the etymological analysis of toponyms from Abkhazia and adjacent territories (1954: 148–189). In this section Ingoroq'va took aim at Janašia's 1940 paper on Circassian (Northwest-Caucasian) morphemes in western Transcaucasia, including what is now Georgian-speaking territory. The hydronymic suffix *-ps-/-pš-* is attributed to a Kartvelian source, cognates of which appear in the (possibly onomatopetic) Common Kartvelian root **ps-* "urinate" and the obsolete Georgian lexemes *pša(n)-* "stream, spring" and *pšaťala* "slush". The alleged Circassian cognates cited by Janašia are written off as either borrowings from Georgian, or as derived from an ancestral form common to both language groups (Ingoroq'va 1954: 185). In the context of Ingoroq'va's argumentation, the Ibero-Caucasian hypothesis was

employed as a device for waving aside evidence that other Caucasian speech communities might have ancient roots within the borders of the medieval Georgian kingdom. I do not know of any explicit reaction by Čikobava to Ingoroq'va's linguistic speculations, but evidence of his opinion can be inferred from Bgažba's (1964) descriptive grammar of an Abkhaz dialect, in which the traditional view of the Northwest-Caucasian origins of Abkhaz toponyms is presented with additional supporting data (1964: 252–269). Čikobava was the *redaktor* of Bgažba 1964, and he along with Ketevan Lomtatidze were singled out by the author for special thanks for their "valuable advice and help in the preparation" of the book for publication (1964: 7).

The appearance of Ingoroq'va (1954) opened a second front in the repudiation of Marrism, but whereas Čikobava and his school retained the broader historiographic approach advocated by Marr and his predecessors as far back as Klaproth, Ingoroq'va's work marked a distinct rupture with respect to the presuppositions underlying the reconstruction of the past. All three scholars — Marr, Čikobava and Ingoroq'va — could be charged with the methodological sin of assuming the correctness of the postulates they set out to prove, and then tailoring or selecting the data to fit. Marr's leading postulates changed throughout his career, mutating from the Semitic-Kartvelian hypothesis through Japhetic to four-element monogenesis and socioeconomic stadialism. Čikobava, like Javaxišvili before him, advocated the genetic unity of all indigenous Caucasian languages, plus a few isolates from the Near East and Mediterranean region, but refused to abandon the family-tree model of West-European historical linguistics, or speculate about genetic or stadial links between Ibero-Caucasian and Indo-European. Marr's linguistics and ethnology could be said to have been informed by Turgot's (1756) dictum that all peoples and all languages are the products of contact and mixture, but taken to an absurd extreme, even as they lacked the methodological caution and self-criticism that Turgot so emphatically advocated. Čikobava's program was closer in spirit to the 'historicism' of critics of the Neogrammarians, such as Curtius or Schuchardt, and retained the model of language mixture, although — as with the Ibero-Caucasian family — he did not extend it beyond the Caucasus. Indeed, Čikobava and his colleagues believed that extensive borrowing and structural influence among languages was a distinctive feature of the Caucasus throughout its history (Čikobava 1955, Lomtatidze 1955).

8.2 *Ingoroq'va's historiographic template*

Ingoroq'va's starting point and leading historiographic presupposition was not so much a methodological postulate as a *template*: an image of the nation as a simple and unnuanced superposition of territory, ethnos and language, with an unbroken existence going back to prehistory. It would appear likely that Ingoroq'va

drew upon some version of late Stalin-era Soviet ethnogenesis theory, applied homogenously across time and space within the borders of medieval Georgia, like the uniform coloring of national territories on a political map (cf. Gordadzé 2000). The appearance in print of *Giorgi Merčule* provoked heated responses by Abkhaz intellectuals and calls for the book to be withdrawn from circulation. The Communist authorities also stepped in and criticisms were made of Ingoroq'va and some of his supporters among the Georgian intelligentsia (Kholbaia et al. 1999: 19–21). But the effect on Georgian and Abkhazian historiography could not be so easily reversed. With few exceptions, the reconstruction of the ethnic and linguistic composition of ancient and medieval Abkhazia become a politicized topic, an arena in which competing claims for sovereignty over the contemporary Abkhaz ASSR were being played out.

Rebuttals to Ingoroq'va's reconstruction of an Abkhaz-free Abkhazia began to appear in print. Abkhaz historians noted that most of their Georgian colleagues likewise attributed Northwest-Caucasian linguistic affiliation to the ancient *Apsilae* and *Abasgoi* (e.g., Melikišvili 1959: 90). In addition, they argued that other Black-Sea coastal tribes ought to be identified as belonging to the same language group, despite the competing claims of Georgian scholars and the difficulty of establishing convincing etymologies of their ethnonyms. So, for example, Ančabadze (1964: 169–176, 1976: 26–48) and Inal-Ipa (1965: 90) equated the ancient *Sanigai* with the Northwest Caucasian Sadz tribe, rather than the Kartvelian-speaking Zans (Mingrelians) or Svans. In Inal-Ipa's view, the *Apsilae, Abasgoi, Misimianoi* and *Sanigai* were ancestors of the contemporary Abkhazians (1965: 90–94; cf. Chirikba 1998: 44–47). Most mainstream Georgian historians credited the ethnic Abkhazians with a long-standing presence in the territory, while insisting that they were never the only ethnic community residing in the territory that bears their name. The *Sanigai, Misimianoi* and other ancient tribes with etymologically non-transparent ethnonyms were claimed to represent autochthonous Kartvelian-speaking ethnic groups dwelling within the borders of what is now Abkhazia.[46] At the same time, Ančabadze's (1976) assertion that a distinctly Abkhazian national identity began to consolidate in the feudal period, and that Abkhaz-speakers played a leading role in the Abkhaz kingdom — even though Georgian was the state language and written medium — received sharp criticism from Georgian historians such as Berdzenišvili (1990: 590–591) and Khoshtaria-Brosset (1997: 69–82). In their view, the Abkhazians, like the Mingrelians, Svans and other West-Georgian populations, adopted the high culture and liturgical-literary language of

46. The ethnonym *Sanigai* was claimed by various authors to be cognate with *Zan* (i.e., Mingrelian) or *Svan*; according to Melikišvili (1959: 100), *Misimianoi* represented the Greek rendering of the Svan autoethnonym *mušwæn.*

Kartli (eastern Georgia), accompanied by the evolution of a common Georgian identity, at first among the elite, and later among other segments of the population. Among representatives of the Georgian scholarly establishment, representations of medieval and ancient Abkhazia took on the contours of an idealized image of the Abkhaz ASSR, in which the Abkhazians enjoy the status of titular nationality (but with Georgian neighbors as far back as can be told), and play an active role in the consolidation of the Georgian state of which they are an integral component.

8.3 *Critics and supporters of the Ibero-Caucasian hypothesis in the Abkhazian history debate*

At first operating somewhat on the margins of the Georgian academic mainstream, but then becoming more visible in the waning years of the USSR and more recently, are attempts to continue Ingoroq'va's project of erasing problematic contributors to Georgian ethnogenesis, but with the support of updated argumentation. In the same work in which he criticized one of the key tenets of the Ibero-Caucasian hypothesis, Aleksandre Oniani also took aim at Čikobava's (1948) and Šaradzenidze's (1955) analysis of Svan as a mixed language with Circassian substratal features (Oniani 1989: 264–299), Janašia's (1940) identification of Northwest Caucasian suffixes in western Georgian toponyms (Oniani 1989: 299–309), and Kartvelian morphemes claimed by Čikobava to have been borrowed from a Northwest Caucasian source (Oniani 1989: 309–318). In several respects, the concluding sections of Oniani (1989) read like a supplement to Ingoroq'va (1954). Not only are Ingoroq'va's toponymic analyses cited by Oniani in his critique of Janašia (Oniani 1989: 301–308), but continuity between the two monographs is evident in Oniani's choice of targets (Marr and Janašia, with the addition of Čikobava) and aversion to any hint of 'mixture' in the Kartvelian languages or Georgian toponymy. Oniani also pointed with alarm to the uptake of Čikobava's and Janašia's "mistaken" notions by Abkhaz historians (e.g., Inal-Ipa 1965: 56–57, 95–96, and more recently, Chirikba 1998: 43, Shamba 1998: 55–56). A more recent contribution to the neo-Ingoroq'vist literature is Gamq'relidze's 1991 etymological revisiting of the ethnonyms *Abkhaz-/Apxaz-* and *Abasg-/Abazg-*. Gamq'relidze argues that the latter root is not related to the Northwest Caucasian *Abaza*, but rather was derived from *Apxaz-* by metathesis due to Greek phonotactic constraints (cf. Put'k'aradze 2005: 138). As for the original reference of *Apxaz-*, "the ethno-cultural state of the Black Sea coast in the first centuries of our era guides us to the possibility of seeing in 'apxaz-'/'Abazgians' tribes of precisely a Western Georgian origin, who must have been close relatives of the Svan and Mingrelo-Laz tribes resident in ancient Colchis" (Gamq'relidze 381991b: 242). The derivation of *Abasg-* from *Apxaz-* is not phonologically implausible, but the claim that the group so designated by ancient writers spoke a Kartvelian language is no more warranted than Ingoroq'va's initial attempt. This new effort to reclaim the

ethnonym *Abxaz-/Apxaz-*, and thereby root the Kingdom of the Abkhazians in the ancient Georgian ethnolinguistic domain, is vigorously debated by Hewitt (1991), who apparently was so eager to have a go at Gamq'relidze's article that he took the trouble of publishing his own translation of it.

Both Oniani and Gamq'relidze were prominent critics of the Ibero-Caucasian hypothesis, and partisans of the neogrammarian school of historical-comparative linguistics which Čikobava had repudiated. While I certainly do not maintain that a narrower, methodologically restrained approach to language reconstruction has necessary implications for ethnocultural historiography, in the writings of these two researchers the narrowed focus of their linguistic reconstructions, excluding all languages beyond the confines of the Kartvelian language family, parallels a similar exclusivity in their representation of ancient Georgian territory. It is as though their linguistic and national models were not built from the ground up, but rather hewn out of those of Čikobava, Marr and Janašia, then cleansed of extraneous elements.

Whereas the historiographic template favored by Oniani continues that of Ingoroq'va, calqued upon an idealization of the nation-state as a straightforward and unproblematic superposition of territory, language and ethnos, the template one detects in the writings of Zviad Gamsaxurdia and certain of his followers is that of a clan or extended family, with clear distinctions between members and outsiders, the latter cast in the roles of allies, enemies or guests (cf. Gordadzé 2001). Gamsaxurdia was an enthusiastic supporter of the Ibero-Caucasian concept in its most exuberant extension. Drawing freely from the writings of Marr, Javaxišvili, Čikobava and other sources, Gamsaxurdia (1939–1993) situated the remote ancestors of the Georgians in a wide-ranging community of peoples descended from the ancient 'Proto-Iberians'. Gamsaxurdia's Iberian family was for the most part coextensive with Marr's Japhetic grouping during his Mediterranean phase; among the speech communities claimed to belong were the Basques, Etruscans, Sumerians, Pelasgians and other ancient Near Eastern peoples (Gamsaxurdia 1990: 8–10). But Gamsaxurdia was neither a linguist nor a historian. As dissident activist and later first president of the independent Georgian Republic, Gamsaxurdia sought to endow his people with a national myth, in which their current geopolitical predicament was set in continuity with events of the remote past. For example, the Trojan War was represented by Gamsaxurdia as a confrontation between the Indo-European Hellenes and the 'proto-Georgian' Trojans (1990: 11), mirroring the oppositional stance of Georgia and the Caucasus to Russia and those western democracies supporting Russian hegemony in the former Soviet territo-

ries.[47] The other indigenous Caucasian peoples, by contrast, as Ibero-Caucasian speakers, were tantamount to kinfolk, and frequently addressed by Gamsaxurdia in such terms. His letters to the Chechens, Circassians and other North Caucasian peoples, written during his brief presidency in 1991, characteristically began 'dear sisters and brothers' (Gamsaxurdia 1994). Messages and speeches addressed to the Abkhazians, among whom a movement to separate from Georgia was already in full swing, contained particularly emphatic appeals to common origins. One such letter began with references to 'our common Colchian origins, the genetic kinship between our peoples and languages, our common history and common culture' (1994: 15). In response to a question about Abkhaz-Georgian relations, Gamsaxurdia reminded his listeners of the Ibero-Caucasian affiliation linking the two languages, then continued, 'but they [the Abkhazians] did not understand that and hence there is this ethnic conflict, even though their origin is truly Ibero-Caucasian. It is truly so. If they would only have the memory, the knowledge of their origins, they would never have stirred up such conflicts with a related people' (1990: 34–35). Gamsaxurdia's appeal for unity finds an echo in a recent treatment of Georgian-Abkhazian relations by Khoshtaria-Brosset (1997), who repeatedly invokes the Ibero-Caucasian hypothesis as evidence of ancient kinship between the two peoples.[48]

47. In key respects Gamsaxurdia's imagined Iberians are the ideological twins of the late Marija Gimbutas' (1921–1994) 'Old Europeans', in that both are represented as ancient civilizations with cultures and indeed mind-sets sharply contrastive with those of the Indo-Europeans who eventually conquered most of their former homelands. Gamsaxurdia, for example, drew a distinction between the "clairvoyant" (*natelxilviti*) culture of the ancient Pelasgians and the "reasoning" (*azrovnebiti*) culture of the Greeks (1992: 12). One also notes striking parallels between Gamsaxurdia's conception of the organic unity of Ibero-Caucasian peoples and the 'Eurasianism' of Trubetzkoy and some of his Russian contemporaries (Sériot 1993). Both Gamsaxurdia and Trubetzkoy imagined a deeper unity among neighboring peoples that transcended religion and nationality, in which their respective nations — the Georgians and the Russians — played a leading role. Furthermore, their visions of unity were forged in opposition to the dominant civilizations that shared the Eurasian continent ('Romano-Germanic' Europe for Trubetzkoy, both Europe and Russia for Gamsaxurdia). Unlike Trubetzkoy, however, Gamsaxurdia also believed in the genetic and linguistic unity of the Ibero-Caucasians.

48. Consistent with their insistance on the organic unity of the Ibero-Caucasian peoples and languages is the stance of certain followers of Gamsaxurdia with respect to Mingrelian and Svan, which they classify as dialects rather than languages (Put'k'aradze 2001, 2002, 2003; Gvanceladze 2004). Since the speakers of these two Kartvelian languages identify themselves, and are identified, as Georgians at both official and informal levels, the designation of Mingrelian and Svan as separate languages is deemed a potential source of division within the very heart of the family. Attempts by the tsarist authorities to create a Mingrelian literary and even liturgical language, written in Cyrillic rather than Georgian script, reinforce the belief that a similar divide-and-

9. *The Ibero-Caucasian hypothesis today*

In his introduction to Gamq'relidze & Mač'avariani, C'ereteli (1965: 048–049) characterized Ibero-Caucasian as 'more a matter of faith than of knowledge; and however strong that faith might be, it cannot by mere force change the position on [genetic] relatedness'. Writing forty years later, Hewitt regarded the hypothesis as all but extinct: "Hardly any one today would claim the Kartvelian (South Caucasian) family to be genetically related to the North Caucasian languages" (2005: 140). As far as the linguistic community is concerned, Hewitt's assessment seems accurate. Except for a cluster of disciples of Čikobava and/or Gamsaxurdia who continue to invoke the concept of Ibero-Caucasian (Gvanceladze 2004; Puť'k'aradze 2005; several contributors to K'varacxelia & Šengelia 1998), and non-specialists who group the Caucasian languages together merely because they have no demonstrated affiliation with better-known language families, support for the genetic unity of the three groups of indigenous Caucasian languages has all but evaporated among linguists who work on these languages. The failure of the Tbilisi Ibero-Caucasianists to win widespread academic support for their proposal can be attributed, in large measure, to the absence of convincing evidence, especially in the form of sound correspondences or strong etymologies, and the lack of strong rebuttals to the arguments of sceptics. The inability of Čikobava to engage effectively with the work of such leading Kartvelologists as Klimov, Deeters, Gamq'relidze, Mač'avariani, and their supporters, led to a loss of credibility in the eyes of the scholarly community. Finally, all it took was a simple (and simplistic) critique by Oniani to bring the house of cards tumbling down, just as the Soviet Union itself was coming to an end.

In other historical disciplines, a significant split appeared between Georgian and Abkhazian scholars with respect to the Ibero-Caucasian hypothesis in the years following the publication of Ingoroq'va's book. Whereas Georgian historians (Berdzenišvili 1990, Melikišvili 1959: 94), archaeologists (Džaparidze 1989: 384–7) and ethnologists (Čit'aia 1946, 1975) continued to assume the primordial unity of the indigenous Caucasian languages — and therefore peoples — in their writings on Georgian ethnogenesis, among Abkhazian scholars and those who share their position, Čikobava's hypothesis has for the most part met with skepticism (Ančabadze 1976: 17–18) or outright rejection (Voronov 1994; Chirikba 1998: 38). The insistent and repeated references to Ibero-Caucasian unity by Gamsaxurdia, Khoshtaria-Brosset and others in polemical works concerning the status of Abkhazia in the Georgian Republic doubtless fostered the impression that the Georgians would remain the senior partners in such an alliance.

conquer policy lurks behind more recent affirmations of Mingrelian and Svan linguistic distinctiveness (Gvanceladze et al. 2001; Japaridze et al. 2005).

Mirroring the almost exclusively Georgian support for the Ibero-Caucasian hypothesis is the prominent role of Russians among the formulators and supporters of the North Caucasian language family. First proposed by Trubetzkoy, then elaborated by Nikolaev and Starostin, the proposal that Abkhaz-Adyghean and Nax-Daghestanian have a common ancestor, which they do not share with Kartvelian, has won wide support among the (largely Russian) community of long-range comparativists who advocated the Nostratic hypothesis. The existence of distinct North Caucasian and Kartvelian language (and ethnic) families is likewise presupposed in the recent encyclopedia of the ethnicities of the Russian Federation edited by Tiškov (1994: 24–37). If, on the one hand, "the idea of shared Ibero-Caucasian languages and Georgia's tribal-cum-cultural identity with selected autochthonous Caucasian nations" nourishes the political vision of a common front of both North and South Caucasian peoples against the geopolitical programs of Russia and/or the West (Jones 2004: 93; cf Law 1998: 177–179), the North Caucasian hypothesis draws a linguistic frontier running along the new international border separating the Russian Federation from the Republic of Georgia. One is reminded of Vogt's (1942: 244) remark, made in his initial, positive evaluation of Javaxišvili's Ibero-Caucasian proposal, that "[the Russian authorities] regardait souvent avec soupçon les savants du pays dont les études embrassaient le Caucase entier, craignant qu'ils ne favorisent par là la création d'une conscience nationale unie des peuples divisés du Caucase et une résistance plus efficace à la politique de russification".

Gamq'relidze (1971) once compared Čikobava to Georg Curtius (1820–1885), drawing upon the regrettably common stereotype of Curtius as a cranky reactionary unable to grasp the significance of the Neogrammarians' methodological innovations. The comparison might in fact be more apt than Gamq'relidze realized. Curtius, one of the leading Hellenists of his day and an important contributor to mid–19th-century historical linguistics, may well have been on the wrong side of the debate over Sanskrit vocalism, but his criticism of the Neogrammarians reflected the humanist, philological orientation of many linguists of his generation, who saw in the doctrine of the exceptionless sound-law an instrument too rigid and inflexible to accommodate the historical and social complexities of language change. Čikobava expressed similar criticisms, but in the background was the concern, voiced earlier by Marr and Javaxišvili, that a narrow, exclusivist focus on a single language family, such as Indo-European, could readily be coupled with national or civilizational bias.

Despite these warnings, both supporters and opponents of the Ibero-Caucasian concept were drawn into the historiographic paradigm shift that Ingoroq'va's book catalysed, or at least brought out into plain view. The debates involving Marr, Javaxišvili and Čikobava and their disciples were principally centered on issues relating to the process of reconstructing the past, even if the unity of the Cauca-

sian languages took on the character of preordained dogma, rather than falsifiable hypothesis, in the research practice of many Caucasologists. In the wake of *Giorgi Merčule,* the endpoint of historical reconstruction, the representation of a cultural or linguistic state of affairs in the past, came to the foreground as doublet of an idealized sociopolitical state of affairs in the future.[49]

Indo-European and Caucasian linguistics both emerged as domains of scientific inquiry in the late 18th century, but whereas the former was from the beginning almost exclusively practiced by scholars of Indo-European background, it was not until the mid–19th century that native speakers of Caucasian languages started to participate as researchers as well as informants. At the turn of the 20th century, Georgian scholars, led by Cagareli and Marr, rose to dominance in Kartvelology, and in subsequent decades native North Caucasian and Abkhazian researchers took up the work begun by Schiefner, Uslar and Dirr. The Soviet policy of indigenization of academic institutions certainly accelerated the process, but the Caucasian takeover of Caucasology was well underway in the late Tsarist period. For all intents and purposes, the Ibero-Caucasian hypothesis is a product of this latter, indigenous-dominated phase.

Compared to the more than 200 years that Indo-European studies has been the affair of Indo-European-speaking scholars investigating one facet or another of their own family history, Caucasian studies has only had a century in which to experience the consequences of institutional research into the deep past of what is represented as the researcher's own ethnolinguistic community. The longer history of scholarship-abetted ethnocentrism in the Indo-European domain can doubtless help us to understand aspects of the present-day Georgian-Abkhaz *Historikerstreit*, but the lesson it teaches does not inspire unmitigated optimism (Tuite 2003). Even today, the leading Indo-European studies journal in the US is published by the extreme-right activist Roger Pearson, and the French Indo-Europeanist Jean Haudry is closely associated with the Front National. Perhaps the main factor which maintains the intellectual respectability of Indo-European studies — despite the Pearsons and Haudrys lurking behind the curtains — is the tradition of agonistic debate and hypercriticism. As long as each Gobineau finds an August Friedrich Pott (1856; cf. Tuite 2006), and, in the case of Caucasology, each Marr is confronted by a Čikobava, each Čikobava by a Mač'avariani, and so on, there is hope that the field will come out from the long shadow cast by the template-driven nationalist historiography of P'avle Ingoroq'va.

49. I draw upon George Orwell here, albeit without his lapidary succinctness.

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SUMMARY

The hypothesis that the three indigenous Caucasian language stocks (Abkhaz-Adyghean, Nakh-Daghestanian, and Kartvelian) are genetically related has little support at the present day among linguists specializing in these languages. Nonetheless, the so-called 'Ibero-Caucasian' hypothesis had strong institutional backing in Soviet Caucasology, especially in Georgia, and continues to be invoked in certain contemporary discourses of a political and identitarian nature. In this paper the history of the Ibero-Caucasian hypothesis will be presented against the background of research into the autochthonous languages of the North and South Caucasus, and also in connection with the historiographic debate over the relation of Abkhazia to Georgia.

RÉSUMÉ

L'hypothèse que les trois groupes de langues autochtones du Caucase (abkhaz-adyghéen, nakh-daghestanais, et kartvèle) soient génétiquement apparentés jouit à l'heure actuelle de très peu d'appui de la part des spécialistes des langues en question. Toutefois, l'hypothèse dite 'ibéro-caucasienne' avait autrefois presque le statut de dogme auprès des caucasologues en URSS, surtout en Géorgie, et au présent, elle refait surface dans des discours de nature politique et identitaire. L'histoire de l'hypothèse ibéro-caucasienne sera présentée dans le contexte des recherches sur les langues autochtones du Caucase du nord et du sud, et également par rapport au débat historiographique autour de la relation de l'Abkhazie à la Géorgie.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Heutzutage findet die Hypothese, derzufolge die drei kaukasishen Sprachgruppen (das Abchasisch-Adygheanische, das Nach-Daghestanische und das Kartwelische) miteinander verwandt seien, wenig Unterstützung seitens der Spezialisten dieser Sprachen. Dennoch erhält die so genannte 'ibero-kaukasische' Hypothese, die in der sowjetischen Kaukasologie, besonders in Georgien, starke institutionelle Unterstützung erhalten hatte, in gewissen politischen und identitäts-bezogenen Diskursen weiterhin Zuspruch. Im vorliegenden Aufsatz wird die Geschichte dieser ibero-kaukasischen Hypothese vor dem Hintergrund der Erforschung der autochthonischen Sprachen des Nord- und Südkaukasus nachgezeichnet, auch im Zusammenhang mit der historiographischen Diskusssion bezüglich des Verhältnisses zwischen Abkhasien und Georgien.

Author's address:

Kevin Tuite
Département d'anthropologie
Université de Montréal
C.P. 6128, Succ. Centre-Ville
Montréal, Québec
Canada H3C 3J7

e-mail: tuitekj@anthro.umontreal.ca