

A New Book on Georgian History
Heinz Fähnrich. History of Georgia

(Heinz Fähnrich, *Geschichte Georgiens*, Handbook of Oriental Studies, Section eight, Central Asia, v.21 = Handbuch der Orientalistik, Brill, Leiden&Boston 2010)

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Abstract: The Western Publishers Brill have issued Professor Heinz Fähnrich's "History of Georgia" in German, in the series *Handbuch der Orientalistik*. The work is written with good knowledge of the subject, scholarly, objective approach and genuine love of Georgia. In moot questions, be these ancient or recent painful issues, the author does not try to take sides, but rests on more or less widely shared views accepted in Georgian historiography, placing absolutely correct accents through his objective presentation.

In the reconstruction of Georgia's early history the author bases himself on Ancient Eastern (Assyrian, Urartian) and Classical sources. He presents the history of the subsequent period, beginning with that of the Parnavazids, mainly on the basis of "Kartlis Tskhovreba" and other important sources. It is advisable to have the work translated into Georgian.

Key words: *Heinz Fähnrich, Georgia*

Regrettably, Georgia finds itself in the centre of attention of today's civilized world largely in the context of political cataclysms, and the information received by the world is often contradictory and almost always determined by politics. Against this background it is

highly essential to supply the international community with positive, politically neutral information.

From the viewpoint of popularization of Georgian history and supplying the Western reader with objective scholarly information about Georgia conforming to the latest achievements highly significant is Professor Heinz Fähnrich's "History of Georgia" in German issued by the well-known Publisher Brill in the series *Handbuch der Orientalistik*.

First a few words about the author. In his versatile and interesting activity Professor Fähnrich set himself research into the Georgian language and culture as his main goal. Spending many years in Georgia, he gained an excellent knowledge of Georgian, and who has spoken to him will agree with me that Mr. Fähnrich can be distinguished from an ordinary educated Georgian only by his perfect mastery of Georgian.

One of the inspirers and editors of the journal *Georgica*, well known in Georgian scholarly circles, was Professor Fähnrich who, in co-authorship with Zurab Sarjveladze, composed "An Etymological Dictionary of the Georgian Language" (H. Fähnrich., Z. Sarjveladze, *An Etymological Dictionary of Kartvelian Languages*, Tbilisi 1990 (in Georgian); H. Fähnrich, S. Sardschweladse, *Etymologisches Wörterbuch der Kartwelsprachen*, Brill, Leiden, New York, Köln 1995). Not long ago H. Fähnrich prepared a new supplemented edition of this work (H. Fähnrich, *Kartwelisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch*, Brill, Leiden, Boston 2007). He is also the author of works on many topical questions of Kartvelian and Caucasian linguistics (see, e.g. H. Fähnrich, *Georgische Toponymie*, Jena 1998; *Gedanken zur kartwelischen Rekonstruktion*, Jena 1998; *Kleines Udisch-Deutsches Wortenterzeichnis*, Jena 1999; *Kartwelischer Wortschatz, Ergänzungen zum Etymologischen Wörterbuch der Kartwelsprachen*, Jena 2000; *Batsisch (Zowatuschisch) - Deutsches Wörterbuch*, Jena 2001; *Kleines Fachwortverzeichnis Sprachwissenschaft, Georgisch-Deutsch*, Jena 2001; O. Kadshaia, H. Fähnrich, *Mingrelisch-Deutsches Wörterbuch*, Reichert, Wiesbaden 2001; H. Fähnrich (Hg.), *Kartwelsprachen*, Reichert, Wiesbaden

2008), and translations (see, e.g. *Mingrelische Sagen*, Aus dem Georgischen von Heinz Fähnrich, Jena 1997; *Chroniken der georgischen Königin Tamar*, Aus dem Georgischen von Surab Sardshweladse und Heinz Fähnrich, Jena 1998; *Mose Choneli: Amirandaredshani*, Deutsch von Surab Sardshweladse und Heinz Fähnrich, Jena 1999; *Abchasische Volksdichtung*, Deutsch von Heinz Fähnrich, Jena 2000; *Giorgi Mertschule: Das Leben des Grigol von Chandsta*, Deutsch von Surab Sardshweladse und Heinz Fähnrich, Jena 2000; *Zwischen Felsen und Geschichten, Erzählungen aus Georgien*, Deutsch von Heinz Fähnrich, Jena 2000; *Mingrelische Märchen*, Deutsch von Heinz Fähnrich, Jena 2001; *Giorgi Mzire: Das Leben des Giorgi Mtazmideli*, Deutsch von Surab Sardshweladse und Heinz Fähnrich, Jena 2001; *Georgischer Wein, Kurzgeschichten vom Tschorochi bis zum Diklos Mta*, Deutsch von H. Fähnrich, Jena 2001).

Of no less significance, scholarly value and reliability are his “Grammar of the Georgian Language” [1] and “History of Georgia” [2], written by him in German for the Western reader. I used these works successfully in teaching foreign students. Other books issued by him recently shed light on various sides of Georgian culture [3; 4; 5].

The work under discussion is written with good knowledge of the task, being an astonishing blend of scholarly, objective approach and genuine love of Georgia. Through dry, objective description, e.g. in the chapter devoted to Georgian geography, the author masterfully manages to answer many questions that subsequently turned against us as political problems. In debateable issues, irrespective of whether they touch on the painful problems of our ancient or recent history, the author, without taking sides, places absolutely correct accents by his objective narration. Accordingly, the book must be highly interesting not only for the Western reader but for Georgians as well.

The work in question covers the history of Georgia – the territory and country – from ancient times to the present day. It is clear, however, that the author does not separate the country’s

history from that of the Georgian nation – at least from the point when it is possible to speak of ethnicity. Accordingly, at least for three millennia, Georgia has been the place of habitation of the Georgian ethno-cultural element. This effect is achieved by largely pushing into the foreground facts of the political and ethno-cultural history. The developments of social-economic history are given much less attention. This is apparent in the periodization as well, which does not follow the methodology of any historical or political science school but is ideologically “neutral”, being largely based on crucial changes in Georgian history. Observation of proportions, as far as possible, between the descriptions of periods should be noted. Naturally enough, we know a greater number of facts and names from new and most recent history, whose problems are closer and more topical to us, upsetting the proportions. To the author’s credit, he has succeeded in avoiding this shortcoming, characteristic of historical works of this type, by rendering information about all periods in an equally vivid, interesting and compact manner.

In the case of ancient and medieval history the author often follows the sources: either quoting directly or conveying the contents of the source with fair precision. To be sure, we cannot place the same trust in all the sources, the more so, in the mythological interpolations found in them, but the above method of conveying the story makes the book livelier for the reader and helps him feel the spirit of the times better than presenting the mutually exclusive and involved argumentation found in the specialist literature around one or another issue.

In connection with moot questions the author leans largely on views more or less widely accepted in Georgian historiography.

In a number of cases, although my views coincide with those of the author, I still believe it justified to note that the question is debatable. Thus, e.g. to argue the traditional version of the origin of Georgian writing the author quotes both the traditional as well as fresh arguments, including the dating of the Nekresi inscriptions to the second half of the 1st millennium BC (pp. 32, 94), which so far is only a hypothesis.

In discussing the ancient Georgian state entities the author mentions the campaign of the Assyrian King Tiglathpileser (end of the 12th c. BC) to Colchis (p.75). This interpretation of the text is acceptable to me, but it should be noted that lately it is not shared by all. Many scholars read another name in place of "Kilhi", nor does the identification of the "Upper Sea" with the Black Sea seem indisputable. Apart from Tiglathpileser's text, hypothetical reference to Colchis occurs also in Linear B texts coming from Mycenaean Crete. Early in the 14th c. BC a man flourished here who was a "Colchian" either by origin or name. If we rest on these two hypothetical references, and cite archaeological material as well, we may presume the origin of Colchian state in the 15th-14th c. BC (cf. p. 78, where the unification is assumed from the 12th c. BC). As to the Daiaeni/Diauhi (Tao), it appears in the texts from the 12th century and dating it to the 13th century (p. 75) in the case of the identification of Hittite texts with *atsi-khayasa* looks more convincing.

Highly interesting is the author's view that Asia, king of the Daieni, looked for an ally in Assyria against Urartu and Colchis. That the friendly meeting of Salmaneser and Asia was in a way an anti-Urartu act does not seem to cause any doubt. Bearing the subsequent developments in mind (the division of the Diauhi lands or spheres of influence between Urartu and Colcha in the mid-8th century), the rivalry between Tao and Colchis in the 9th century seems to me quite real. I find it difficult to concur with the author's view according to which other Georgian countries arose following the decline of the Diauhi: Katarza, Zabaha, Iganiehi, Uiteruhi and others (p. 78). These tribal or state confederations existed synchronously with the Diauhi and, in my view, they opposed Urartu in the role of open or secret allies of the Diauhi.

Whereas in reconstructing Georgia's ancient history the author rests on Ancient Eastern (Assyrian, Urartian) and Classical sources, he conveys the history of the subsequent periods – beginning with the period of the Parnavazids – largely according to *Kartlis Tskhovreba* ("Life of Georgia"). The list of the Parnavazids is

reconstructed basically according to G. Melikishvili and V. Goiladze. Here I was surprised to find that the author assigned the nickname *Kveli* ("brave") to Parsman of the 1st century BC rather than to the one whose statue was set up in Rome in the 2nd century BC.

Writing the most recent history of Georgia must have been most difficult for the author. Here he could not lean on Strabo or Leonti Mroveli, and he was faced with the task of describing and assessing our present times without being subjective. The author's version may not be to everyone's liking but in my opinion, the author coped well with this tricky topic too.

I discovered the principal shortcoming of the book only after I read it. Being fascinated by the book I advised many a friend of mine to buy and read it. Before long, all complained to me that the book was too expensive. Indeed, at this price only European libraries may purchase it. This fact strengthened my desire to have the book translated into Georgian. It will doubtless prove very interesting both for persons residing abroad and interested in Georgia and for the broad Georgian-speaking readership.

References:

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