

Personal Archives and Life and Work Chronologies of Writers

Abstract: Association for Textual and Editorial Studies and Digital Humanities is carrying out a project aimed at digitalization and cataloguing of Guram Rcheulishvili's archive. The documents are scanned under the consultancy of the writer's sister – Marine Rcheulishvili who knows the history of every folio and has published his works in six volumes. High resolution Tiff format will enable scientists to zoom the image so that its quality was not diminished. It is very important for reading difficult passages of the manuscripts, making graphical konjectures and creating exact transcripts. The catalogue of the archival documents will be published on the organization's web-page.

Key Words: Digital Archive, Guram Rcheulishvili, Chronology of Life and Works, Bio-bibliography.

Life and work chronology (chronicle) or a bio-bibliography is the most exhaustive historical-biographical book about writers. There you can find full information about the works, publications made in their lifetime, everything published in the same period about them and all kinds of biographical facts. For many years such books were prepared on the basis of already existing information and no scientific investigations were carried out to identify authorship, addressees and people mentioned in the works, or to date undated biographical facts and writings. In 2013 the head of the Textual Scholarship department at Shota Rustaveli Institute of Georgian Literature had an idea - to combine the process of bio-bibliography creation with these kinds of textual researches.

The first project to realize the idea was aimed at creation of life and work chronicles of a famous Georgian public figure and writer - Iliia Chavchavadze. The project was especially successful thanks to the textual researches carried out for it: 166 personal letters were dated, a number of authorship problems solved, more than a hundred of addressees and people mentioned in the texts – identified. After creating the annotations based on these researches and adding them to the book, its volume increased three times and the bio-bibliography became more exhaustive. Besides its exhaustiveness, it is very important that the edition is scientifically reliable - every annotation is provided with a special scientific apparatus. The “Chronicle” is published electronically as an ordinary Pdf file but is provided with hyperlinks. All the information about the sources, the results of: attribution, dating and personal identification researches, as well as references and the digital copies of the documents are embedded in the hyperlinks. You can find Georgian (Ninidze, Amir Khanashvili: 2017) and English (Ninidze, Rukhadze 2017) versions of the Chronicles, as well as the book of investigations carried out for the project (Ninidze 2016), in the digital library “Iverieli” (<http://dSPACE.nplg.gov.ge>).

Another Georgian author, whose bio-bibliography is being created in the same innovative format, is the famous Georgian romantic poet - Grigol Orbeliani (both projects were sponsored by Shota Rustaveli National Science Foundation). I am sure that the new “Chronology” will be as highly demanded and popular as was the previous one because the editions, prepared on the basis of fundamental scholarly investigations are very important for the development of the Humanities.

Being a student of the doctoral program “Textual Scholarship and Editorial Studies” I got familiar with the principles, methodology and technology of carrying out researches associated with preparation of the Chronologies and got involved in the investigations. I should say that digital bases of historical texts and the technologies worked out by our supervisors are really very helpful. They enable us to get much more information than it was possible just a few years ago. We work mainly on digital copies of manuscripts, create typical and atypical tables of the authorial handwriting and make transcripts using a new – stage-layer complex method of reading manuscripts. We carry out authorship attribution and text dating researches applying corpus study method and technologies. Our researches wouldn't be so successful without these methods, up-to-date knowledge and special skills. It makes me think that methodological and technological innovations are absolutely necessary for textual scholars.

In the two cases named above, when textual scholars were preparing bio-bibliographies of Ilia Chavchavadze and Grigol Orbeliani, most of the documents they had to investigate, were kept in The National Archives of Georgia, Georgian National Center of Manuscripts and G. Leonidze Museum of Georgian Literature. As all the three are State institutions, the scientists had official access to the documents, could work there and purchase digital copies of the necessary items for the publication in the “Chronicles”. As my doctoral thesis envisages textual studies of the materials connected with Guram Rcheulishvili’s life and works and the investigations cannot be carried out without the archival materials, the situation is a bit different. Almost all the original documents, manuscripts photos, and even copies of the very few documents deposited elsewhere, are kept in his private flat and have been unavailable for the scientists until now. Sister of the writer, the professional philologist Marine Rcheulishvili has published six volumes of Guram Rcheulishvili’s works (Rcheulishvili 2004-2012) and has provided all the texts with very exhaustive information about the author, his autographs and creative history of the works but the archive has not been catalogued until now and textual scholars are not familiar with the documents.

How important is it to catalogue the writer’s archive and make the documents accessible for textual scholars? First of all let’s say a few words about the importance of the author.

Guram Rcheulishvili started his creative journey in 1956, when the Soviet regime was in full power in USSR member Georgia. In his works especially acute is the problem of reevaluation of false, Soviet values. Scholars believe that information encoded in his texts is quite complex and consists of “worldview, psychic, genetic, intellectual codes and layers”, which “creates the unified textual reality of thought and emotion, in which additionally is encoded author’s and his epoch’s social, historic-cultural, spiritual and intellectual information” (Kvachantiradze 2014: 5). Guram Rcheulishvili was distinguished from his contemporaries by his creative work and introduction of free, European flow in Georgian literature. Due to that, as of today, for the generation of the age over 50, he is associated with novelty and unrestricted way of thinking; while youth love Guram Rcheulishvili for the originality of form and intellectual and spiritual depths.

Guram Rcheulishvili is a classic writer. His works have been discussed in every theoretical scientific research dedicated to the XX century Georgian literature and a great number of articles investigate different aspects of his literary heritage. In 2014 the 9th issue of a Literary Journal “Criticism” was dedicated to his 80th anniversary and the articles of different literary scholars published in it (Manana Kvachantiradze, Nona Kupreishvili, Lali Avaliani, Manana Kvataia, Maka Jokhadze, Maia Jaliashvili, Amiran Arabuli and Konstantine Bregadze) were about Guram Rcheulishvili’s fiction.

In 2005, Guram Rcheulishvili’s “Salamura” (The Flute Player) was published in the collection – 10 Best Georgian Stories (Rcheulishvili: 2005); in 2008, his “Alaverdoba” was printed in the book – 20 Best Georgian Stories of All Times (Rcheulishvili 2008) ; in 2009, his “the Death in the Mountains” was included in the two-volume edition of the Literary Masterpieces (Rcheulishvili 2009); and in 2010, his “Grandpa Kote’s Autumn” was included in the collection – Georgian Literature Classics for Children (Rcheulishvili 2010). It is especially important that all these collections of selected works carry his different stories and not one and the same. “Kitesa” and some other works by Guram Rcheulishvili were translated into English by students of Oxford University and published in 2018 in a collection of stories and plays “Unlocking the Door”.

Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia has included Guram Rcheulishvili in the recommended writers list annexed to the National Curriculum; his stories are being published in various authors’ certified textbooks and the secondary school pupils find them very up-to-date. His writings are also taught on humanitarian faculties of the universities.

There is a great number of memorial articles, written about Guram Rcheulishvili by his contemporaries. The books of memories about him have been written by such authors as Nugzar Tsereteli and Giorgi Shatberashvili. Prominent film directors have made documentary and fiction movies on his life and works, e. g.: Giorgi Shengelaia’s “Alaverdoba”; Nodar Managadze’s “The Spring is Leaving”; Iase Tsintsadze’s “Portraits of the Century – Guram Rcheulishvili” etc. A great number of TV and radio programs (Guram Rcheulishvili and his Epoch; Epochal Names etc.); video-lectures about his literary work (for example by Gia Arganishvili) and audio-versions (for example by Murman Jinoria) of his writings are available on the Internet. Prominent poets and painters have dedicated to him poems and

portraits; one of the Caucasus peaks, a street and a school in Tbilisi, have been named after him; there is Guram Rcheulishvili Society and Literary Prize named after him.

All these facts prove our great interest and respect towards Guram Rcheulishvili and if his archival materials become accessible, much more scientists will get involved in the investigation of his literary heritage and our knowledge about the XX century Georgian literature will become more exhaustive, comprehensive and qualified.

Association for Textual and Editorial Studies and Digital Humanities supported my project which envisages digitalization and cataloguing of Guram Rcheulishvili's archive and, what is especially important, the family of the author was so kind as to let us fulfill our objectives. The process is labor-intensive but very interesting and the closer I get to the authentic documents, the better I realize how important they are. The author's handwriting is very specific but after making some typological tables and carrying out graphical analysis, I got used to it. I am scanning archival documents under the consultancy of the writer's sister – Marine Rcheulishvili who knows the history of every folio and helps me to identify correlation of untitled texts with other documents. We are making copies in a high resolution Tiff format which will enable scientists to zoom the image so that its quality was not diminished. It is very important for reading difficult passages of the manuscripts, making graphical conjectures and creating exact transcripts.

This will be the first case in our country when cataloguing of the archive will be carried out on the basis of the digital copies. After the scanning process, every archival leaf is being put into the envelope and given temporary number. The same number is given to the PC folder where the digital copy is kept. After having finished the work we won't touch artifacts any more. Digitalization gives us a chance to classify texts according to the literary genres, genetic correlation and chronology on the basis of digital copies. After having finished cataloguing and changing the folder numbers, we will replace the temporary figures written on the envelopes with final numbers and the process of cataloguing will be over. Before the creation of the online digital archive, the electronic copies of the documents will be kept together with the material artifacts, as well as in the office of the Association for Textual and Editorial Studies and Digital Humanities. As for the catalogue, it will be published on the organization's web-page.

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