FRIDRIK THORDARSON (†)

OSSETIC GRAMMATICAL STUDIES
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Abbreviations

1. Common terms
A.D. Anno Domini e.g. for example p(p). page(s)
B.C. before Christ f(f). following page(s) PN proper name
cf. confer fn. footnote repr. reprint
cent. century FN family (clan) name resp. respectively
ch. chapter id. idem rev. revised
comm. common i.e. id est s.v. sub voce
cp. compare lit. literally unid. unidentified
ea.a. et alii ms. manuscript viz. namely
ed. editor / edited / edition mss. manuscripts vol. volume

2. Grammatical terms
abl. ablative fut. future obl. oblique case
abs. absolutive gen. genitive part. participle
acc. accusative ger. gerund pass. passive
adess. adessive inanim. inanimate pl. plural
adj. adjective indef. indefinite poss. possessive
adv. adverb iness. inessive pres. present (tense)
all. allative inf. infinitive prevb. preverb
anum. animate instr. instrumental pron. pronoun
com. comitative interj. interjection sg. singular
cop. copula intr. intransitive s(sub). subjunctive
dat. dative loc. locative subst. substantive
def. definite masc. masculine suff. suffix
dem. demonstrative nom. nominative tr. transitive
equ. equative ntr. neuter voc. vocative
fem. feminine obj. object(ive)
### 3. Languages

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<td>East Caucasian</td>
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<td>Indo-Iranian</td>
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<td>ORuss.</td>
<td>W.Cauc.</td>
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<td>Oss.</td>
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<td>Turk.</td>
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<td>Turkish</td>
<td>Yazgh.</td>
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**Abbreviations:**
- PIE: Proto-Indo-European
- PrDig.: Proto-Digor
- Proto-Germanic
- Proto-Indo-Iranian
- Proto-Iranian
- Proto-Kartvelian
- Proto-Ossetic
- Proto-Nakh
- Romance languages
- Russian
- Saka
- Sarykoli
- South Caucasian
- Sarm.
- Scytho-Sarmatian
- Scythic
- Slavic
- Turkmenian
- Ubyk
- Ukrainian
- Uralic
- Uygur
- Vedic
- Vedic
- W.Cauc.
- West Caucasian
- Yazgh.
- Yazgulamian
- Yidgh.
- Yidgha
Editor’s preface

The present work, opus postumum of an author who was certainly the best connaisseur of Ossetic among Western linguists, has kept me busy for one and a half years. Now the edition has been completed, and I should like to add some lines of my own to the late Prof. Fridrik Thordarson’s “Ossetic Grammatical Studies”.

It was a summer day in 1981, when a colleague from Oslo knocked at my door in Vienna University and said that he would like to get to know the young lady writing her PhD thesis on Ossetic. He was the first person outside the Soviet Union who really took interest in my research on Ossetic onomastics. We started a vital talk on our common subject, the Iranian language of the Caucasus. This first meeting with Fridrik Thordarson had quite an encouraging effect on me. Since then I felt less lonesome with my scientific subject. Not only for me, but also for some other young linguists from the Western hemisphere, Fridrik represented a mature friend who was always ready to give his help. Over twenty years we met regularly, mainly within the framework of the “Societas Caucasianologica Europaea” which was officially founded in Oslo in 1986, during an unforgettable conference organised by Fridrik Thordarson himself, who spared no effort to develop the legal grounds of our international “Societas”. During our many meetings I had the great opportunity to make friends with Fridrik, whom I highly appreciated for his trustworthiness and for his fine humour. The last time I met him was in summer 2000, on the occasion of the last conference of the “Societas” in Munich. He seemed to be unchangeably young and always bursting of creativity. The bad news of his disease and his death after a third stroke on the 2nd of October 2005 shocked us all tremendously, to say the least. For the small discipline of Ossetic studies, Fridrik Thordarson’s death meant an unimaginable loss.

Among Fridrik Thordarson’s colleagues nobody knew that he was preparing a great book. He happened to discuss some details here and there and showed restricted parts of his “Studies” to some colleagues, but nobody had ever seen it as a whole before. It was his wife, Dr. Kirsten Schack Abrahamson, who to her great surprise discovered huge files in her late husband’s computer, and then also found some printouts of chapters of a book in statu nascendi.

Originally the book comprised five different, extensive versions from different years plus the first pages of one more, obviously proofread version, dated the 16 July 2004. One part of them, representing but the first three chapters, was typewritten. It is the only version containing a short “Preface”, obviously still in a provisory form, dated as early as April 1994. But it could be concluded from the whole conception that this date does not tell anything about the real origin of the work. Furthermore, there were also two variants of an unfinished bibliography, relating to the first three chapters only. All these versions were incomplete, but they complemented each other in many respects. Parts of them contained also handwritten corrections. The arrangement of the chapters did not represent the typical order of a conventional grammar, though. As there was no table of contents, it could not be stated with certainty whether this arrangement was planned as such for a later publication. Concerning their size and degree of completion, the respective chapters differ considerably from each other. There is no particular paragraph on the verbal system in Fridrik Thordarson’s book. The fact that the author chose the designation “Grammatical Studies” instead of “Grammar” can be interpreted in a way that no special chapter on the verb was intended, but Fridrik Thordarson did not hesitate to give specific information on the verb in different parts of his Grammatical Studies, depending on the contexts. Thus, his treatise on the preverbs
and their functions as aktionsart and aspect markers reveals many hitherto unknown
details.

Together with his many articles, the present book represents the fifth essence of
Fridrik Thordarson’s multifarious work on Ossetic and his life-long occupation
dedicated to all kinds of linguistic categories of that language. The author’s wide
interest in and his active competence of the modern Ossetic language enabled him to
deal with refined subjects such as idiomatics and syntactical problems with the greatest
ease. His work on Ossetic shows a well-balanced proportion of research into older
stages of the language as well as its modern varieties.

Fridrik Thordarson’s “Ossetic Grammatical Studies” can claim to be the first
Ossetic grammar that systematically takes into account the results of modern Indo-
Europeanists’ and Caucasiologists’ research. This was the main basis of his innovative
theses and explanations on the history and dialectology of the Ossetic language and on
the areal role the Ossetic language played in past and recent periods. It is evident that
the present book will widely contribute to our knowledge on the relative chronology of
some of the migrations of the Ossetes and their neighbouring peoples and tribes in the
Caucasus. This side-effect is by no means unintentional, for Thordarson knew well that
in the case of the Ossetes, who are a people without a written tradition, only serious
linguistical research can enlighten the past centuries to a certain extent.

It is one of Fridrik Thordarson’s main merits to have combined the methods of
areal linguistics with purely historical-etymological research. In the present book he
revealed more about the historical background of the various linguistic contacts of
Ossetic and its neighbouring languages and the social interactions standing behind them
than anybody else before.

Fridrik Thordarson spoke Ossetic fluently. His fine knowledge of the language did
not only open the hearts of the local people for him, but also enabled him to undertake
effective fieldwork. His studies in the fields of comparative phonology and
toponomastics, which led him to conclude that the focus of innovative developments in
Ossetic of any kind has always been the Dzædužyqæu (Vladikavkaz) Plateau, must be
called pioneer work. But even if we let the focus on areal linguistics aside, Fridrik
Thordarson’s research must be regarded as completely innovative, especially with
respect to the Ossetic noun and the noun phrase, and so are his morphosyntactic studies.
What we have here is the most extensive investigation that has ever been written on the
Ossetic noun, considering both the inherited Indo-Iranian models and historical changes
due to areal influence.

The Epilogue is an essay of its own. It reconsiders historical, ethnological and
sociological reasons of migration and language shift. Except for wars and natural
phenomena, such reasons could be specific marriage customs, traditional interethnic
adoption institutions, or blood revenge.

To sum up, Thordarson’s opus magnum postumum represents not only a new stage
in the research of the Ossetic language. On the basis of exact linguistic methods, it also
provides us with hitherto unknown aspects of cultural history and migratory movements
in the far and more recent past of the Northern Caucasus area.

In 2006 I was offered the opportunity to edit Fridrik Thordarson’s unfinished book,
by his widow, Dr. Kirsten Schack Abrahamsen, who not only opened her late husbands
library and her house to me but also helped me with bibliographical research, many
kinds of organisational matters, and, most of all, encouraging words. I would like to
express my deep gratitude to her.

For the financial realisation of the project I am greatly indebted to both Prof. Per
Kvaerne (University of Oslo / Institute for Comparative Research in Human Culture)
and Prof. Bert Fragner (Institute of Iranian Studies of the Austrian Academy of
Sciencies, Vienna), whose common initiative created the basis for a scientific joint venture resulting in the publication of the present book.

Furthermore I have to thank Prof. Winfried Boeder who allowed me to include a short unprinted article by Fridrik Thordarson which he had intended to edit himself (cf. the end of the present work).

My thanks also go to Dr. Agnes Korn (University of Frankfurt) who was always ready to help me with bibliographical research, mainly concerning Iranica. Furthermore, I am thankful to Prof. Manana Tandashvili and Lela Samushia, M.A. (University of Frankfurt), for their advise on lexical problems concerning the modern Kartvelian languages. I would also like to express my particular gratitude to Dr. Elguja Dadunashvili (Rustaveli Institute, Tbilisi, Georgia) who provided me with a photocopy of the 1946 edition of the Nartic Epos.

Last but not least, I am feeling particularly grateful towards my husband, Prof. Jost Gippert (University of Frankfurt), who not only formatted the author’s original files but who also performed an acribic proofreading of all parts of the book as well as the technically complicated work of bringing all kinds of indexes into a digitally correct form. Without his encouraging attitude, readiness to discuss open questions, and digital skills, the present book would not have seen the light.

My own part in finishing this book is humble. I felt deeply moved when I was given the honour to do the final work on a great project that could not be undertaken any more by the author himself. My contribution consisted in aligning the different versions, verifying and completing the greater part of the bibliographical notes and sometimes also the lexical and formal entries, and in compiling the indexes. In a few cases, when necessary, I felt it useful to refer to more recent literature that could not be considered by Fridrik Thordarson himself any more. Additions of this kind are marked by [S.F.].

All in all, I have always tried not to change the author’s wording, whenever possible. It goes without saying that all the wealth of ideas expressed in this book as well as the conclusions remain Fridrik Thordarson’s property.

Frankfurt, June 2008                             S.F.
Author’s Preface

These studies have a long history. The first drafts were written during my stay in Tbilisi and South Ossetia in 1968-69, when I for about a year had the opportunity to listen to Ossetic speech from the lips of native speakers. Some of my notes from that time have since been elaborated and published in various books and periodicals, while others had to wait. In the following chapters an attempt will be made to treat in some detail with questions relating to language contacts and the role neighbouring languages have played in the history of Ossetic.

My sojourns in Georgia in 1968-69 and again in 1989 were supported by the Georgian Government in accordance with the cultural agreement of Norway and the Soviet Union. I also received support from the Institute for Comparative Research in Human Culture, Oslo, the Norwegian Research Council, the Universities of Oslo and Tbilisi and the Norwegian Royal Ministry of Foreign Affairs. To all these institutions I am deeply grateful.

I also want to express my thanks to friends and colleagues who assisted and inspired me in my Ossetic and Caucasian studies. First of all I mention my teachers of the University of Oslo, the late Prof. Georg Morgenstierne, who introduced me to the study of the Iranian languages and first suggested Ossetic as the subject of special research to me, and Prof. Hans Vogt, who taught me Georgian and general Caucasian linguistics.

I owe a debt of gratitude to my many friends of the South Ossetic Research Institute of Cxinvali, in particular Doc. Gähbätty Nikolae, Gagloity Juri and Džusoity Nafi, who all acted as my mentors during my stay at their institute in 1969.

Thanks are due to Doc. Olga Tedeeva of the Oriental Institute of the Georgian Academy of Sciences, who guided my first steps as a speaker of her mother tongue, and to my two teachers of Georgian, Prof. Elene Babunashvili and Dr. Ineza Kiknadze, both of the University of Tbilisi. I also want to express my gratitude to Prof. Tamaz Gamkrelidze, the Director of the Oriental Institute of the Georgian Academy of Sciences, who offered me an opportunity to participate in his linguistic seminars at the university and thus introduced me to the circles of Georgian linguists.

Last but not least I am indebted to my many anonymous informants in both North and South Ossetia, who in 1969 and on later occasions answered my numerous questions and with patience and generosity gave me an insight into their language. To them and their compatriots these studies are dedicated.

Oslo, April 1994.

F. Th.
Chapter 1

1. Introduction

1. Ossetic is the last offshoot of the North East Iranian (Scytho-Sarmatian) dialects which in antiquity were spoken all over the Ponto-Caspian steppes of South Russia and the North Caucasus. The language has gradually been ousted or superseded through migrations within the Caucasus and through invasions from the north, and is now spoken but in a small area in the Central Caucasus, where it is surrounded on all sides by genetically unrelated languages. In the greater part of its former territory Slavonic, Turkic and Northwest Caucasian languages now prevail. At one time Ossetic (or its Alanic precursor) was brought to the Caucasus area, probably in various waves, by immigrants and conquerors from the north. It did not enter a linguistic vacuum, although unfortunately, we have no precise knowledge of the indigenous languages which it must have supplanted. But by and large, we can take it for granted that there existed linguistic contacts between Ossetic (Alanic) and some North (-west,-east) Caucasian languages ever since the arrival of the former in the area. The first Turkic-speaking tribes certainly entered the North Caucasus later than the linguistic forefathers of the Ossetes. In their turn Turkic languages have little by little replaced Ossetic over a great part of the territory where it was formerly spoken.

It is generally acknowledged that the Ossetes descended from the Alans, a Scytho-Sarmatian tribe or tribal confederacy, who at the beginning of our era had gained the hegemony in the Ponto-Caspian steppes. From the words of Josephus Flavius (1st cent. A.D.), who mentions them as living in that area about 35 A.D., we can probably conclude that they had been residing in the Kuban Valley for some time (Jos. Flav., Bell. Jud. VII,7,4). The difference between their language and that of the cognate Sarmatian tribes farther to the west or north was hardly significant. The Alanic inscription found by the Zelenčuk River in the Northwest Caucasus in 1888 dates to all appearances from the 11th–12th century (Zgusta 1987: 19; cf. also Abaev 1949: 260 ff.). At that time an Alanic-speaking population inhabited the country to the south of the Kuban River, and we have no reason to believe that they were newcomers. The Byzantine emperor Constantine Porphyrogenitus (first half of the 10th century) places the kingdom of the Alans (al-Lin) borders on the kingdom of the Sar (Avaria, North Daghestan) in the east, and on the Kashak in the west (Circassians); the Alan capital, called Maghans (Ma us), seems to be situated in the neighbourhood of Vladikavkaz (Şeneğişer), the present capital of North Ossetia, at the foot of the Darial Pass. The same location of the Alans is found in the geographical descriptions by other Arabian writers: Ḥudūd al-ʿAlam: The Regions of the World, transl. Minorsky 1937: 160 ff.; late 10th cent.; Ibn-Rusta: al Aʿlāq al-mafīsa, apud Minorsky 1958: 166 ff.; early 10th cent.; the Tārīkh al-Sīḥ wa-Sharwān, ed. and transl. Minorsky 1958, passim; comments pp. 107 and 156 ff. – But it goes without saying that one should be on one’s guard against identifying a political power with a language community.

1 A survey of the languages of the Caucasus area is given by Geiger, Halasi-Kun, Kuipers & Menges 1959. For details I refer to the relevant chapters in Comrie 1981 and in Klimov 1994.

2 According to Procopius (History of the Wars, VIII,3,4; 6th cent.), the eastern borders of the Alans were the Caspian gates. The Caspian Gates have variously been identified with Darband and Darial, the two principal passes of the Caucasus. Their name (Kūrma Pūlān, Portae Caspiae) is commonly used by the Darial Pass by Greek and Roman writers of the Imperial age (cf. Marquart 1901: 100; 1903: 489; Minorsky 1958: 87 (note); Gagloity Ju. 1966: 136 ff.). – According to al-Mas‘ūdī (Murūj al-dhahab, ch. 17; 10th cent.), the kingdom of the Alans (al-Lin) borders on the kingdom of the Sar (Avaria, North Daghestan) in the east, and on the Kashak in the west (Circassians); the Alan capital, called Maghans (Mahans) /CID460/, seems to be situated in the neighbourhood of Vladikavkaz (Şeneğişer), the present capital of North Ossetia, at the foot of the Darial Pass. The same location of the Alans is found in the geographical descriptions by other Arabian writers: Ḥudūd al-ʿAlam: The Regions of the World, transl. Minorsky 1937: 160 ff.; late 10th cent.; Ibn-Rusta: al Aʿlāq al-mafīsa, apud Minorsky 1958: 166 ff.; early 10th cent.; the Tārīkh al-Sīḥ wa-Sharwān, ed. and transl. Minorsky 1958, passim; comments pp. 107 and 156 ff. – But it goes without saying that one should be on one’s guard against identifying a political power with a language community.