

## GENERAL REMARKS

### 1.0. Svan as a member of the Kartvelian linguistic family.

Svan forms one of the three branches of *Kartvelian*, the other branches being *Zan* with *Megrelian* ("Mingrelian") and *Laz (Chan)* dialects and Georgian with 16 dialects. All Kartvelian languages are spoken on the territory of the Georgian SSR and 4 dialects exist outside it (three Georgian dialects in Azerbaijan, Iran and Turkey, and the Laz dialect of Zan in Turkey).

The name Kartvelian comes from the ethnonym of Georgian *kartvel-i* which, according to the newest hypothesis of A. S h a n i d z e (1978<sub>2</sub>), is supposed to be the name of *p a r t h s*, the Iranian nation whose military detachments in the 3rd c. B.C. came from Parthava, colonized the Mtskhethian part of Georgia, founded there a monarchy and in the following centuries were entirely assimilated to the local population leaving to the latter their name *partvel-i* 'Parthava-man'\*. Georgian is the only Kartvelian language belonging to a high culture, having a rich and ancient literary tradition. The first documents of it (O. Georgian) are dated from the beginning of the 5th c.A.D. (epigraphic inscriptions from Palestine). It is significant for this study that the earliest Georgian documents (up to the 8th c.A.D.) are characterized by the so-called *khanmetoba*, the redundancy of *khan-i* (the name of the letter *x* in the Georgian alphabet), i. e. by the prefix *x-* as the verbal subjective formant of the 2nd, and the indirect-objective formant of the 3rd persons. From the 8th, 9th c. the haemet texts are known with *h-* ("hae") in the place of *x*. Both may also appear before the versional marker *-i*. For the later fate of *h-* see S h a n i d z e, 1982 (1978<sub>1</sub>). For centuries Georgian has been the only literary language for Svans, Megrels and Lazs, though they have rich folklore traditions of their own, texts having been recorded from the end of the 19th c.

Svans, who live high in the mountains in the north-west of Georgia on the slopes of the Svania Range (to the south from the Main Caucasian Range), due to their geographical isolation, have preserved many archaic features in their culture, folklore and language, which may help the investigator to reconstruct the origin of the Kartvelian phenomenon. There are a number of contradictory views on the latter. According to one of them (A. C h i k o b a v a) Kartvelian is genetically related to North Caucasian (Abkhaz-Adyghe, Daghestan) forming a southern branch of

---

\*This hypothesis has not been yet generally adopted; a more persuasive one is not known to us. For the correspondence *p* → *k* cf. Geor. *papa* 'porridge' → Svan *kak*.



hypothetical Ibero-Caucasian. According to another view (G. Machavariani, K.-H. Schmidt) it is a separate linguistic family showing typological closeness to Indo-European and Caucasian, or (Th. Gamkrelidze, G. Tsereteli) it is a separate family typologically close to Indo-European and formed on the basis of Indo-European during the process of its caucasization (Gamkrelidze-Machavariani, 1965, 1982). The investigations of G. Deeters, G. Klimov, Th. Gamkrelidze and G. Machavariani show Svan to have been the first to separate from Common Kartvelian (after the 19th c.B.C.). After the 8th c.B.C. Common Georgian-Zan splits, Zan dividing into Laz and Megrelian in the time of the final formation of Georgian but before the present state of Svan.

As for Svan, from the very beginning of its research (accidentally in the 19th c., systematically from the beginning of the 20th c.) it is known in 4 main dialects: Lentekh and Lashkh in Lower Svania, Upper Bal and Lower Bal (named after the interstitial mountain Bal) in Upper Svania. The historical settlements of the Upper-Bal speakers are Ushgul (the highest settlement, ca. 2,500 m., in the East), Hadish, Khalde, Kal, Ipar, Yeli, Tswirmi, Mulakh, Mestya (centre), Lendjer, Latli. They are followed in the West by Bechwi, Tskhumar, Etser, Par, Nakra, Lakhmul, Luz, Lower Ipar, Chüber and Khayish where Lower Bal is spoken. Almost all of these settlements are surrounded by or consist of a number of smaller villages. There are about 35,000 Svans nowadays, ca. 18,800 of them speak Upper Svan (i. e. Upper and Lower Bal), ca. 9,800 speaking Upper Bal.

The typical features of Svan phonetics are reduction, umlaut and quantitative vowel gradation, the latter distinguishing Svan from Zan and Georgian. All together these features are represented only in Upper Bal which is therefore the most typical Svan dialect. There are no quantitative vocalic oppositions in Lower Bal, no umlaut in Lashkh, no reduction and quantitative oppositions in Lentekh. The latter is important as it has preserved the non-reduced historical vocalism. Lashkh is interesting as presenting some final results of the umlaut, e. g.  $e \rightarrow \delta$ .

As the Upper-Bal forms are mostly cited in various comparative studies, this dialect is to be described in the first place. Further we endeavour to give a general characteristic of Upper Svan and a more specified characteristic of Upper Bal. It means that only those peculiarities of Lower Bal (except the absence of the quantitative oppositions) are dealt with, which constitute a distinctive feature of this dialect in comparison with Upper Bal.

As for Lentekh and Lashkh, the specific character of their isoglosses demands a separate outline.