



## ABAEV, VASILII IVANOVICH

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**ABAEV, VASILII IVANOVICH**, Ossetic-Russian Iranologist and general linguist (b. K'obi, Georgia, 15 December 1900; d. Moscow, 18 March 2001; [Figure 1](#)).

*Life and works.* From 1910 to 1918, V. I. Abaev pursued Russian-based secondary education in the Sixth Classical Gymnasium of Tiflis (now Tbilisi). Soon after graduating, he joined the newly founded Ossetic Historical and Philological Society, and for a while he combined amateur research with teaching in the primary school of his native village. Abaev's interest in the language and history of his country eventually brought him to Petrograd (now St. Petersburg). In 1922, he was accepted into the Faculty of Social Sciences of Petrograd University with the recommendations of the leading Ossetic intellectuals of the time.

From 1922 to 1925, Abaev studied Iranian philology under the guidance of A. A. Freiman (q.v.; 1879-1968), while his views on theoretical linguistics views fell under the influence of N. Ya. Marr's (q.v.; 1864-1934) "New Linguistic Doctrine," which denied the comparative-historical method in linguistics and linked language history with social progress and class struggle. During his student years, Abaev published several research papers, the earliest and the most famous of which established the laws of Ossetic accentuation. At the same time, he actively participated in the revision of V. F. Miller's Ossetic-Russian-German dictionary as a member of the team directed by Freiman. Later, however, he expressed a sharp criticism of many features of this work, and especially of the fact that the main editor did not possess an adequate knowledge of Ossetic (review in *Yazyk i Myshlenie*, 1934). This critical view



would eventually lead him to the idea of creating his own Ossetic dictionary.

After finishing his university studies, Abaev became a postgraduate student of Marr at the Institute for Comparative Studies of the Languages and Literatures of East and West. In 1928, Abaev ended his postgraduate studies without completing his dissertation. After a short period of research work in Tbilisi, he was invited to join the staff of Marr's Yaphetic Institute in Leningrad (the name given to Petrograd in 1924). His scholarly articles of this period deal mostly with Ossetic grammar, lexicon, and dialectology, while some of them try to synthesize the traditional and Marrian approaches to linguistics. On the basis of this research work Abaev was awarded the doctoral title *honoris causa* in 1935.

The death of Marr in 1934 coincided with the period when Abaev began to address broader Iranological topics. In the late 1930s and early 1940s, he published several Russian translations of Achaemenid Old Persian inscriptions and etymological studies of individual Ossetic words. Remaining on the staff of the erstwhile Yaphetic Institute, now renamed the Institute of the Language and Thought, Abaev spent much time in Ossetia, consulting the edition of the Nart epic and conducting field work. Cut off from the beleaguered Leningrad by the events of World War II, Abaev continued to work in Northern and Southern Ossetia till 1945.

The early post-war years, which Abaev spent in Leningrad, saw three important publications that mark the end of the earlier stage of his linguistic career. The pioneering monograph *Nartovskii epos* (The Nart epic; *Izvestiya Severo-Osetinskogo Nauchno-Issledovatel'skogo Instituta* 10/1, Dzaudzhikau, 1945), was devoted to the historical and philological discussion of the Ossetic national epic. *Russko-osetinskii slovar'* (Russian-Ossetic dictionary; Moscow, 1950) represented the first bilingual dictionary geared to the needs of Ossetic speakers and was accompanied by a concise descriptive grammar of Ossetic. *Ossetinskii yazyk i fol'klor* (Ossetic language and folklore; Moscow, 1949) included a collection of essays dedicated to issues of Ossetic historical linguistics and dialectology. In the introduction, the author pays homage to the late Marr, but its methodology is in fact not very different from that of traditional historical linguistics.

"Skifskii yazyk" (Scythian language), one of the most interesting essays included in *Ossetinskii yazyk i fol'klor*, deals with a reconstruction of the lexicon of the Scythians, whom he believed to be the remote ancestors of the



Ossetes, based on toponyms and personal names preserved in Greek, Roman, and Near Eastern sources (see [SCYTHIAN LANGUAGE](#)). Abaev was able to analyze a much larger corpus of Scythian data than his forerunner in this field, the German linguist M. Vasmer. Another famous essay included in the same book is “Ocherk raskhozhdenii ironskogo i digorskogo dialektov” (Outline of the divergence of the Iron and Digor dialects). Here Abaev’s results were largely based on his own fieldwork in the area. He had managed to make a systematic comparison of the two main Ossetic dialects, Digor (q.v.) and Iron, on all levels of traditional linguistic analysis. The thoroughness and precision of this dialectological work was probably unparalleled in the Iranian studies of that time; these virtues are, of course, partly due to the fact that the survey was completed by a native speaker.

After Stalin denounced Marr’s theories as anti-Marxist, the Institute of Language and Thought, created by Marr, underwent a purge. Even though Abaev’s scholarly views were already rather distant from those of Marr, he refused to repudiate his teacher in order to save his own life. According to some sources (*Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 27 December 2000), he was excluded from the prepared list of the “enemies of the people” by Stalin’s own hand. The Soviet dictator wrote on the margin: “Let him be. A good man. Transfer to Moscow.” In Moscow, Abaev began to work in the newly founded Institute of Linguistics.

In the changed conditions, Abaev was able to concentrate on his most ambitious project, the *Russko-osetinskiĭ slovar’* (Russian-Ossetic dictionary). The preparation of this monumental work, which will be discussed separately below, began shortly after Abaev’s graduation and played a pivotal role in the second part of his life. Yet, he was able to combine this lexicographic work with many other contributions to Iranian studies and historical linguistics.

An important by-product of the dictionary work is Abaev’s small book *Skifoevropskie izoglossy: Na styke Vostoka i Zapada* (Scythian and European isoglosses: on the boundary between East and West; Moscow, 1965). It contains a discussion of more than twenty lexical items that are present in Ossetic and in other Indo-European languages of Europe but are totally unknown to the rest of the Iranian languages. Abaev accounts for this by putting forward a hypothesis that the Scythians, the ancestors of the Ossetes, separated themselves very early from their immediate relatives and became a part of the European cultural circle.



Abaev contributed several articles to the study of Zoroastrianism (q.v.), notably “Skifskii byt i reforma Zoroastra” (Scythian lifestyle and Zoroaster’s reform; 1956 [see *Bibliography* for the collected works]). He regarded Zoroaster (q.v.) as a historical personality and accepted the traditional dating of his life to the 7th-6th centuries BCE. On the basis of a literal interpretation of *Yasna* 29, he concluded that the message of the Iranian prophet was primarily a social one. According to him, Zoroaster emphasized the necessity to protect livestock from ruthless slaughtering. The dualism (q.v.) of Zoroaster represents a cosmological projection of the opposition between peaceful, settled cattle-breeders and warlike, cattle-slaying nomads. The second category was personified by the Tūras, whom Abaev identified with the Sakas and ultimately with Scythian and Sarmatian tribes. At the same time, the mention of Tūra Friiāna as a disciple of Zoroaster probably indicates that the latter did not shy away from extending his sermon to the nomads.

Throughout his life, Abaev could not turn away from the study of the Ossetic national epic. He generally favored an analytical approach to epic studies and regarded the songs of the Narts as a relatively late compilation of individual cycles. He accepted the conclusions of Georges Dumézil (q.v.; 1898-1986) concerning the elements of ancient Indo-European ideology preserved in the Nart epic, but at the same time he was eager to emphasize the impact of Caucasian neighbors of the Ossetes on its later development. Unlike most Iranists, who regard the name of the epic as Iranian, he maintained its derivation from the Mongol word for sun, *nara*.

Yet another object of Abaev’s interest was the history of Ossetic literature. He authored several critical essays, published both in scholarly and in literary journals, with the aim of acquainting Soviet readers with 19th- and 20th-century Ossetic poets and writers, such as K. Khetagurov (1859-1906; see XETÄGKATI), S. Gadiev (1883-1931), and G. Maliev (b. 1938). Being a connoisseur of Russian literature, he was interested in exploring its connections with Iranian folklore. He argued, for example, that the monster Viy, portrayed in the eponymous story by N. V. Gogol, was taken by the author from an otherwise lost Ukrainian folk tale and is ultimately related to Vāyu (q.v.), the Old Iranian ominous wind deity (“Obraz Viya v povesti Gogolia” [The image of Viy in Gogol’s story], 1958).

Although Abaev never held an official teaching position after he left his village, during his stay in Moscow he trained several generations of scholars in Avestan and Old Persian, as well as in Ossetic. In the absence of any



comparative Iranian program at the Moscow State University, graduate students and young researchers would come to his apartment once a week for informal classes. A tradition of Soviet academic life obliged young scholars to have editors/internal reviewers from among their senior colleagues; Abaev prepared for publication more than fifteen books dealing with language, history, and folklore of various Iranian peoples, from Kurds to the inhabitants of the Pamirs. Several dissertations were prepared under his guidance by scholars from Ossetia and Tajikistan.

The most controversial items of Abaev's heritage are his articles dedicated to the issues in theoretical linguistics that he published in the 1960s. In these works, he expressed his disappointment with what he regarded as the "formalist" tendencies in contemporary linguistics. In particular, he condemned the neo-grammarians teaching of the absolute character of sound laws and the Saussurean distinction between synchrony and diachrony. These publications coincided with the period when Soviet leaders launched a political campaign against "formalism" in fine arts. Although Abaev's position was probably motivated purely by his scholarly convictions, and he emphasized the uselessness of prohibiting "formalist" linguistics, many linguists at the time perceived his anti-formalist articles as denunciations.

The second part of Abaev's life was marked by widespread recognition of his scholarly merits. He was habilitated *honoris causa* in 1962 and awarded a professorial title in 1969. The North Ossetian Autonomous Republic (1957) and the Georgian Republic (1980) bestowed upon Abaev the title of an Honored Science Worker. He was elected an Honorary Member of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland (1966), a Corresponding Member of the Finno-Ugric Society (Helsinki, 1973), and an Honorary Member of the Russian Academy of Natural Sciences (1992).

Abaev lived in Moscow for fifty years, and died on 18 March 2001, shortly after his 100th birthday was celebrated in Moscow and in the North Ossetian capital Vladikavkaz, where a street now bears his name.

*Theoretical views.* Abaev believed that every language must be studied in its socio-historical context. It is only fair to say the same thing about the study of the scholarly views of Abaev, who represents one of the most unusual figures in the Iranian studies of the twentieth century.

The period when Abaev began his scholarly career represented one of



transition for the humanities and social sciences in Russia. The scholars who previously worked in conditions of intellectual freedom now had to adapt to the requirements of Marxist-Leninist ideology dominant in the USSR. While for some researchers it was a painful process involving necessary compromises, some others, like Marr, jumped upon the possibility to advance their careers by claiming that their theories were more politically correct than those of their opponents. Ironically, this could help them to preserve the integrity of their views, since a theory that becomes an ideology does not need to adapt to another ideology.

Traditional comparative philology had little chance to win favor among Bolshevik leaders. Terms like “Aryan” began to be exploited by racial supremacists of all kinds long before Hitler and were of no use for those who wanted to unite the workers of all nations in a fight against their oppressors. Traditional Indo-Europeanists and Iranologists were frequently regarded as useful but ultimately expendable “technicians,” whose task was to prepare the first generation of proletarian scholars. It was typical of the time that Abaev suggested a new, supposedly unmarked term “Prometeids” for the Indo-Europeans, by analogy with the Semitic and so-called Yaphetic families (“Dva slova o terminakh” [Two words for terms], 1926).

The theory of Marr, which directly linked linguistic development and social progress, had a much better potential for symbiosis with Leninist ideology. The “New Linguistic Doctrine” developed with every kind of support, but without much guidance from the Soviet authorities, and its dynamic growth impressed many young scholars besides Abaev. To the credit of the latter, he never accepted the teachings of Marr as the only viable approach to historical linguistics, and described his views as the Hegelian synthesis of the neo-grammarians thesis and the Marrian antithesis.

Abaev recognized the importance of both grammatical and lexical research, but it is the latter field to which he attributed the highest ideological value. The lexemes, especially their synchronic connotations and historical connections, are, according to him, the main repository of the ideological component of a language. For example, the fact that Ossetic *wacajrag* ‘prisoner’ is cognate with Persian *bāzār* ‘bazaar’ directly reflect the social conditions of a slaveholding society, where prisoners of war could be sold from a marketplace. Consequently, cognitive and historical semantics are social disciplines, and Soviet scholars have the duty to apply a Marxist paradigm of historical analysis to lexical research.



Grammar, on the contrary, is a “technique,” the main purpose of which is to make communication successful. Therefore, the traditional methods of historical linguistics can be applied to grammatical studies. The same can be said about those lexemes that have lost their ideological connotations (“Yazyk kak ideologiya i yazyk kak tekhnika” [Language as ideology and language as technique], 1934). Abaev bitterly mocked those “new linguists” who were willing to dedicate their research to establishing the reactionary nature of English prepositions and similar pseudo-scholarly tasks.

The complexity of Abaev’s attitude towards Marr’s legacy can be illustrated by the following quotation: “Even though 75 percent of Marr’s paleontological (sic) etymologies are erroneous, the remaining 25 percent are enough to signify a new stage in the history of theoretical linguistics” (“Poniatie ideosemanitiki” [Concept of ideo-semantics], 1946, p. 17). In a later article, Abaev recognized that the conclusions of the “New Linguistic Doctrine” were fundamentally incorrect, but he praised Marr for raising important questions about language (“N. J. Marr [1864-1934]. K 25-letiju so dnia smerti,” 1960).

A specific feature of the “New Linguistic Doctrine” that attracted Abaev was the attention Marr and his followers paid to language convergence and language contact, and, in particular, to the non-Iranian “Yaphetic” substrate in Ossetic. The fact that such terms as “man,” “horse,” “hand,” “foot,” etc. are expressed in Ossetic by Caucasian borrowings was and remains only of secondary interest for many Iranologists, who are looking into Ossetic for Iranian archaisms. Abaev, however, was equally interested in the other Indo-European elements and in the borrowed lexical stock of his native tongue.

According to Abaev, the entire history of the Ossetic people can be defined in terms of their linguistic and cultural contacts, and these contacts can be established through lexicographic analysis. The Scytho-European period (ca. 600 BCE to 300 CE), when the Scythians and Sarmatians, the supposed ancestors of the Ossetes, maintained close contacts with various European ethnic groups, was followed by the Alano-Caucasian one (ca. 300-1200 CE). In this period, the Huns (q.v.) and other Altaic (q.v.) tribes drove the Sarmatians to the south, towards the Caucasus, where they continued to exist under the name of Alani and significantly influenced the local languages. The beginning of the modern period is marked by the Mongol invasion, when most Alani were massacred or assimilated and their so-called “prestige potential” drastically dropped: instead of being mainly the source of borrowings, the Ossetic language (q.v.) accepts loanwords from its Caucasian neighbors.



As might be expected, Abaev did not welcome the rise of structural linguistics. Its main tenets contradicted his convictions in at least three ways. First, according to him, it was anti-historical, since it separated synchrony and diachrony. Secondly, it was anti-lexicalist, in that it focused on the study of grammatical structure at the expense of vocabulary. Thirdly, it was holistic, in that it was frequently more interested in generalizations than in the peculiarities of individual languages. Abaev was not the only person who was alienated by these features of modern theoretical linguistics; it is fair to say that they are largely responsible for the frequent lack of understanding between general linguists and historically oriented ethnic scholars, including Iranologists. Abaev, however, went so far as to deny to “formalists” the right to be called linguists. Thus, he compared linguistic analysis leading to computer translation with the technique of slicing fish for canning and wondered whether the latter was ever regarded as a significant contribution to ichthyology (“Lingvisticheskiĭ modernism kak degumanizatsiya nauki o yazyke” [Linguistic modernism as a dehumanization of the science of language], 1965).

Polemical statements of this kind were not unusual in Abaev’s career and hardly helped his relationship with his colleagues. It is characteristic, however, that even his most adamant opponents did not dare to deny his contributions to Ossetic philology. As Abaev put it in one of his early articles, “The principle ‘one must like what one studies,’ important in every science, is everything in ethnic studies.” This very principle did not allow the Ossetic scholar to cross at any time the frontier that separates serious research from kitsch. Whatever theories formed a part of Abaev’s credo, his research was inspired not by aprioristic convictions, but by his passion for the language and history of his own people.

*Lexicography and Etymology.* Abaev’s major work, *Istoriko-etimologicheskii slovar’ osetinskogo yazyka* (Ossetic historical and etymological dictionary), extends to four volumes (vol. I, Moscow and Leningrad, 1958; vols. II-IV, Leningrad, 1973, 1979, and 1988). A separate index to them was later prepared in the Linguistic Institute in Moscow (*Istoriko-etimologicheskii slovar’ osetinskogo yazyka: Ukazatel’*, ed. by E. N. Shchesnovich et al., Moscow, 1995). This dictionary, summarizing Abaev’s earlier lexicographic and etymological research, constitutes his most important legacy and secures his position as one of the most eminent Iranologists of the 20th century.

Abaev’s work was the first comprehensive diachronic dictionary of any



Iranian language. Previous publications of the same kind, like *Grundriss der neupersischen Etymologie* (q.v.) by P. Horn (q.v.; 1863-1908) or *Etymological Vocabulary of Pashto* by G. Morgenstierne (q.v.; 1892-1978) are very selective in the lexemes treated, while Ch. Bartholomae's (q.v.; 1855-1925) *Altiranisches Wörterbuch* is essentially a synchronic work. By contrast, Abaev's dictionary encompasses all the Ossetic lexicon except for recent borrowings and transparent derivatives, illustrates their usage by examples from Ossetic literature, and provides extensive discussion of their etymologies. In addition, some lexical entries contain ethnographic digressions, or discussions of methodological problems. The four volumes of this work are written in good Russian, without unnecessary linguistic terms and abbreviations. Abaev targeted not only a handful of narrow specialists, but also all educated people interested in Ossetic culture.

Abaev's dictionary functions as a unique thesaurus of Iranian etymology. Its index is a starting point for many Iranologists and historical linguists in their search for etymological data concerning less-studied Iranian languages. In addition, Uralic scholars regard its contribution to Finno-Ugric studies as comparable to that of a major work in the field. Abaev discussed many Iranian loanwords in Finno-Ugric, from Finnish *sarvi* 'horn', ultimately borrowed from Proto-Iranian, to Old Hungarian *aladár* 'centurio cohortis praetoriae' (i.e., captain of the guard), possibly borrowed from Alanic. This fact deserves a separate mention since there are almost no lexical borrowings from Finno-Ugric languages into Ossetic—the influence went from south to north. Strictly speaking, Abaev could have omitted most of his Finno-Ugric references as non-essential for explaining the Ossetic facts. However, the natural curiosity of an etymologist prompted him to include these data.

In general, linguistic borrowings form an area where Abaev was frequently more successful as a practical lexicographer than other Ossetic scholars. Thus V. Miller, the nineteenth-century predecessor of Abaev in the domain of Ossetic studies, regarded Oss. *mät'äl* 'depressed' as a reflex of PIE *\*tem* (cf. Lat. *timēre* 'fear') with metathesis, while Abaev opted for the common Ar. *mo'aṭṭal* 'broken, desolate' as a probable source of borrowing (II, p. 109). Morgenstierne connected Oss. *amistol* 'the name of a summer month, June-July' with Av. *hamina-* 'summer'; but Abaev, being aware of the fact that other months of the Ossetic calendar were named after Christian saints, and remembering that Saint Peter and Paul's day occurs in that particular month, convincingly explained this word as a corruption of Gk. *apóstolos* 'apostle' (I, p. 51).



At the same time, Abaev was capable of changing his mind about borrowings. In 1949, he believed that Oss. *kusart* ‘a slaughtered animal’ is borrowed from the family of Hebrew *kāšēr* ‘proper, fitting; kosher’ (“Drevneevreiskie elementy v Osetinskom” [Ancient Hebrew elements in Ossetic], 1949). This comparison was one of the two items meant to demonstrate the cultural connection of the Alans with the Khazars (qq.v.). Later he became aware of the fact that the Iranian root *v\*kauš* (as in Pers. *koštan* ‘to kill’) meant “to slaughter an animal” in several Iranian languages. In the dictionary, he accepted the Iranian origin of Oss. *kusart* and mentioned the Hebrew word only as a possible source of contamination (I, p. 603).

The following discussion focuses on certain features of *Istoriko-etimologičeskii slovar’ osetinskogo yazyka* that reflect the linguistic convictions of its author not always shared by the *communis opinio* of Iranologists. These remarks are not to be taken in a spirit of denigration, but the readers of the dictionary must apply their own judgment as whether to subscribe to Abaev’s position or not.

(1) The ideological component of Abaev’s approach to Ossetic vocabulary, less manifest in the dictionary than in his earlier works, can still be illustrated with his analysis of Oss. *nartä* ‘the Narts’, the collective name of the heroes of the Ossetic national epic. Abaev (II, p. 159) objects to its derivation from Ir. *\*nar-* ‘man, male’ on the grounds that such a designation would be impossible in a society with the strong matriarchal tendencies that are allegedly portrayed in the Nart epic. The phenomenon of “matriarchate,” commonly referred to by 19th-century evolutionary anthropologists, underwent thorough deconstruction in more recent studies. It is not quite clear what meaning is assigned to this term by Abaev, but scholars generally agree that both Indo-European and Iranian societies were strictly patrilinear and mostly patrilocal. A great and independent role played in the epic by Satana, the wife of the hero Wryzmäg, hardly dictates any more anthropological generalizations than the fact that the goddess Hera can successfully manipulate her husband Zeus in the *Iliad*.

(2) In spite of the emendations that Abaev made in the dictionary in reference to his early works, he still sometimes appears biased towards the Caucasian origin of certain Ossetic words. One of the best examples is *xwycaw* ‘god’. It is tempting to link it to Parth./MPers. *xwadāy*, Bactr. *χσαδηο*, Sogd. *xutāw* (all “lord”), etc., which go back to *\*hva-tāw(y)a* ‘autocrat’; but there are two difficulties. Firstly, the development *\*t > c* is irregular; one would expect Oss.



*\*xwydaw*. Secondly, this word is not attested in Old Iranian, and so it was suggested that it represents a calque from Hellenistic Greek *autokrátōr* ‘autocrat’. The question of possible contacts between Scythians/Sarmatians and other Iranians at that time remains unsettled, and Abaev was inclined to minimize the likelihood of such contacts. Therefore, he compared Oss. *xwycaw* ‘god’ with Lezgin *xucar* ‘god’, Georg. *xucesi* ‘priest’, and similar words; and he accepted at most the secondary influence of Iranian cognates (IV, pp. 255-56). Caucasian words, however, do not solve formal problems (the Ossetic suffix *-aw* remains unexplained), and in addition it is difficult to establish the common source of these alleged cognates (Lezgin and Georgian belong to two genetically unrelated groups). If a contamination is indeed involved, it is logical to assume that *\*xwydaw* underwent the influence of Caucasian forms, not vice versa.

(3) Abaev makes extensive use of what he calls “cross-isoglosses,” arguing that certain phonetic changes that are regular in one language may be sporadically observed in related languages. Thus, according to him, Ir. *\*s* becomes *s ~ š* in Ossetic, and *θ* in Old Persian, but three words (*fārāt* ‘axe’, *rātān* ‘rope’, and *talm* ‘elm’) show the dialectal change *\*s > \*θ > t* (I, p. 451). While the sound change suggested by Abaev for these words is most probably correct, there is no immediate reason to think that Old Persian should be involved here except as a typological parallel.

A more complex case is offered by Oss. *rixi* ‘beard’ vs. Pers. *riš* ‘id.’ and Oss. *rus* ‘cheek’ vs. Pers. *roḵ* ‘id.’. Abaev reconstructs here the Proto-Iranian forms *\*raiša-* and *\*r(a)uš-* respectively (II, pp. 416, 432). The normal reflection of Proto-Iranian *š* is *š* in Persian and *s ~ š* in Ossetic, while in Slavic languages we would indeed expect *\*x* in the same position in the cognate lexemes. The suggestion of Abaev can be reformulated in the following way: In prehistoric times, some Slavic speakers were assimilated by the Iranians but preserved certain phonetic habits, like the pronunciation of *-x-* instead of *-š-* in individual lexemes. The obvious drawback of this hypothesis is the necessity of postulating Iranian-Slavic linguistic contact at some point before the ancestors of Persians migrated to the Iranian plateau. There is no independent confirmation that the conditioned sound change *\*s > x* had been completed in Slavic at that time.

(4) Abaev claims that some words, commonly called expressive or onomatopoeic, are not subject to regular sound laws. For example, lexemes that denote round, swelling, or protruding objects are, according to him very



likely to be expressed by consonant complexes of the types TP, CP, and KP (with different resonant extensions). Those words frequently appear, so to speak, out of nowhere, and attempts to etymologize them are generally a waste of time (III, pp. 331 ff.).

It is true that the so-called “expressive” words create difficulties for comparative linguists. Yet the recognition of such a class *de jure* by lexicographers may prove to be even more detrimental. The root of the problem is that one cannot strictly define which word is “expressive” and which is not. The usual practice of etymologists is to label as “expressive” those words that display anomalous phonetic development. The systematic implementation of Abaev’s principles may lead to a different situation: the words with suspicious semantics may be automatically discarded from further etymological analysis. In fact, Abaev is not very consistent in following his own guidelines and usually takes up the analysis of expressive words too.

There is no doubt that individual etymological solutions presented in the *Istoriko-etimologicheskii slovar’ osetinskogo yazyka* will be refined in a course of subsequent scholarship. It is unlikely, however, that new suggestions will frequently build up on the lexical material not included in Abaev’s *magnum opus*. Abaev’s erudition in both Iranian and non-Iranian languages, relevant for the study of Ossetic, remains unparalleled in the field.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

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The main works of Abaev have been mentioned in the body of this entry. In the case of articles, only their Russian titles and the year of publication have been cited. For a full bibliography (of 311 items), see *Vasiliū Ivanovichu Abayevu 100 let* (V. I. Abaev 100 years old), Moscow, 2000, pp. 297-310. The same book contains a detailed and affectionate obituary by his former student M. I. Isaev (pp. 11-62), which focuses on Abaev’s contributions to various fields of scholarship. The revised version of many of his articles can be found in *V. I. Abaev: Izbrannye trudy* (Selected works), ed. by V. M. Gusalov, vol. I: *Religiya. Fol’klor. Literatura* (Religion. Folklore. Literature), Vladikavkaz, 1990; vol. II: *Obshcheisravnitel’noe yazykoznanie* (General and historical linguistics), Vladikavkaz, 1995.



Abaev's legacy is also discussed in the proceedings of a conference in his honor *Aktual'nye problemy iranistiki i teorii yazykoznaniya* (Current issues in Iranology and linguistic theory), ed. by T. Guriev et al., Vladikavkaz, 2002. For an earlier appraisal of Abaev's impact on Iranian studies, see a collection of articles on the occasion of his eightieth birthday *Poetika zhanra* (Poetics of the genre), ed. by Z. Sagalaeva et al., Ordzhonikidze, 1980 (especially pp. 3-74). The only Western volume dedicated to Abaev is *Studia Iranica et Alanica: Festschrift for Prof. Vasilij Ivanovič Abaev on the Occasion of his 95th Birthday*, ed. G. Gnoli et al., Rome, 1998.