

Preface

My first introduction in the Iranian language Ossetic was in 1993 when Dr. A. Lubotsky instructed me and a fellow-student in this rarely taught language. At first, it was a subject like another. But gradually, I became enchanted with this last trace of the Iranian languages which used to be spoken in the vast plains of Eurasia before the arrival of the Turks and Mongols. Regrettably, it is little-known to the public, even to the educated, that numerous Iranian tribes have existed in antiquity. While some who are versed in the classical languages are familiar with tribal names like Scythians, Sarmatians or Alans mentioned by Herodotus and Pliny, only few are able to link them with a small Caucasian people who seldom “make the headlines”. I have experienced at first hand that the Ossetians take great pride in their illustrious past. When reading and learning about their history I cannot help recalling the motto of Herodotus: “For most of those which were great once are small today; and those which used to be small were great in my own time” (transl. A. de Sélincourt).

Due to this fascination I have devoted much time and effort in the clarification of several aspects of Ossetic, especially lexical, which brought me into contact with the most divergent language families like Finno-Ugric, Turkic, East and West Caucasian. The study of Ossetic has also greatly enhanced my knowledge of other Iranian languages.

In this preface I would like to commemorate the following persons: the eminent Ossetian scholar V.I. Abaev (†18.3.2001), whose works are the basis of this *Studies*, the great Iranist and renowned expert of Khotanese, R.E. Emmerick (†31.8.2001), with whom I maintained contact by e-mail, and, finally, Germanist and former colleague Dirk Boutkan (†6.1.2002). The sudden and totally unexpected demise of Dirk came as a great shock to me and colleagues of our Department. His cheerfulness and warm character used to brighten up the whole Department, which we sorely missed after his departure. And I deeply regret that it is only now, *post mortem*, that I am able to comprehend the pain he suffered, and the demons he fought against during his lifetime.

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J. C.