

# **A Life between Worlds: The Scholarly and Cultural Legacy of Manana Tandaschwili**

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In the field of Caucasiology, few scholars have made as sustained and multidimensional an impact as Professor Manana Tandaschwili. Her career over the years is not only a confirmation of her academic rigour and visionary thinking but also a demonstration of the unique power of language as a cultural bridge and a living repository of human memory. Her work reaches beyond Georgia and Europe, creating new intersections not only in linguistics but also in terms of connections and friendships, as she is highly esteemed by all her colleagues and students across the world.

Born in 1960, Manana Tandaschwili had a rather complicated youth, like many in the Soviet Union. Nonetheless, she always excelled in school and was a dearly loved friend, as she has been until today. Her major passion, music, has accompanied her from the beginning (she plays the piano and the guitar and has an astonishing singing voice), and at one point in her life, she considered pursuing this path as her future career. But her family encouraged her interest in education and language and nurtured in her a precocious curiosity about the structures and social roles of speech, writing, and cultural expression. The result was a strong interest in journalism, which she wanted to pursue after completing her primary and secondary education in Tbilisi, and so she enrolled at Ivane Javakishvili Tbilisi State University, one of the oldest and most respected research institutions in the Caucasus. As fate would have it, journalism was not for her – the admission was restricted to a limited number of students, and after receiving high praise from her former teacher for recognising and analysing linguistic structures, she enrolled in Caucasiology instead. Her intellectual formation was influenced by a range of outstanding mentors such as Tedo Uturgaidze and Mzekala Shanidze. She graduated in 1983, already marked by a commitment to crossing the boundaries of conventional linguistic analysis. Afterwards, she continued her academic career at the Arnold Chikobava Institute of Linguistics, where she pursued her doctoral studies between 1988 and 1993, and in 1995, she was appointed head of the Department of Computer Linguistics at the same Institute. As she saw the immense potential in bringing together linguistic theory and computational tools, her interest and motivation grew to create databases of the under-resourced and endangered Caucasian languages – a work with a dual purpose: preserving linguistic diversity and expanding the methodological toolkit for a generation of Georgian linguists.

With three children and an elderly mother to care for, Tandaschwili had not anticipated being awarded, as one of the first Georgians, a fellowship from the prestigious Alexander von Humboldt Foundation in 1999. This brought her first to Munich and later to Frankfurt in Germany, to collaborate with renowned scholars such as Wolfgang Schulze and Jost Gippert. The fellowship marked a new phase in her intellectual journey – one that would solidify her place



Manana Tandaschwili on Mount Sinai, holding a Caucasian-Albanian palimpsest

as an internationally recognised expert in Caucasian languages and their digital representation. From ARMAZI<sup>1</sup> to GNC,<sup>2</sup> her involvement and leadership in these and other projects shaped the future of Caucasiology and brought about the foundation and development of new fields such as Digital Kartvelology and Digital Rustvelology. These projects not only facilitated the digitisation of endangered Caucasian languages but also advanced methods in corpus development, digital text annotation, and multilingual database design.

Manana Tandaschwili's ability to coordinate transnational research consortia while maintaining scholarly depth became one of her defining traits. In 2002, she joined Goethe University in Frankfurt, where she would become a cornerstone of the Institute for Comparative Linguistics, later called Empirical Linguistics. She taught a wide range of courses, including general linguistics, typology, language documentation, multilingualism, and the languages of the Caucasus.

Manana Tandaschwili's seminars were known for their intellectual rigour, interdisciplinary scope, and encouragement of critical enquiry. Over the years, she became a mentor for countless students from both Georgia and Germany. She supervised over fifteen doctoral dissertations, many of which have become important contributions to linguistic theory, corpus linguistics, or digital humanities. Her mentorship is distinguished by a unique blend of academic precision, cultural empathy, and an insistence on methodological clarity. Manana Tandaschwili also co-founded the annual Batumi Summer School in Digital Humanities in 2011. The school introduced a new generation of Georgian students to methods of digital annotation, corpus creation, and computational text analysis. Under her guidance, the University of Batumi became an unexpected but vital node in the international digital humanities network.

1 <https://armazi.fkidg1.uni-frankfurt.de>.

2 <http://gnc.gov.ge>.



Manana Tandaschwili while teaching “Introduction to Linguistics” in 2007

Additionally, Manana Tandaschwili has been a passionate cultural ambassador. She founded several non-profit organisations aimed at introducing contemporary Georgian writers to German audiences and fostering cross-cultural exchange, and she has curated and edited multiple anthologies and books of Georgian literature in German translations. These works have been widely praised for their aesthetic quality and for introducing German-speaking readers to the emotional and thematic richness of modern Georgian prose and poetry. Her cultural initiatives were instrumental in Georgia’s role as Guest of Honour at the Frankfurt Book Fair in 2018.

Naturally, Manana Tandaschwili’s work and success were honoured on many occasions. In 2006, she received the degree of “Habilitation” and the honour of “Privatdozent” at Goethe University in Frankfurt, and in 2008, she was nominated for the “Excellent Teaching” Award by the same university. In 2011, the city of Tbilisi recognised her achievements by naming her an honorary citizen – an honour that reflects not only her academic stature but also her role as a cultural bridge-builder. For her long-term cooperation and significant contribution to the development of Shota Rustaveli State University in Batumi (such as the establishment of the yearly Summer Schools in Digital Humanities, the creation of an educational program in the same direction in 2015, and the founding and opening of the Digital Humanities Centre in 2016), she received an honorary doctorate in 2018.

On the Day of the Georgian Language in 2024, she was awarded a medal for her achievements, and in 2025 she received the honorary prize as a “worthy diaspora member” from the Parliament of Georgia. In the same year, her efforts were recognised with yet another prize by the Shota Rustaveli National Science Foundation of Georgia, for her contribution to Caucasiology.

Manana Tandaschwili’s influence extends even beyond the institutions she has shaped, the students she has mentored, the languages she has digitised, and the cultural bridges she has built.



Manana Tandaschwili receiving her honorary doctorate from Batumi University in 2018  
(<https://www.bsu.edu.ge/sub-8/page/10799>)

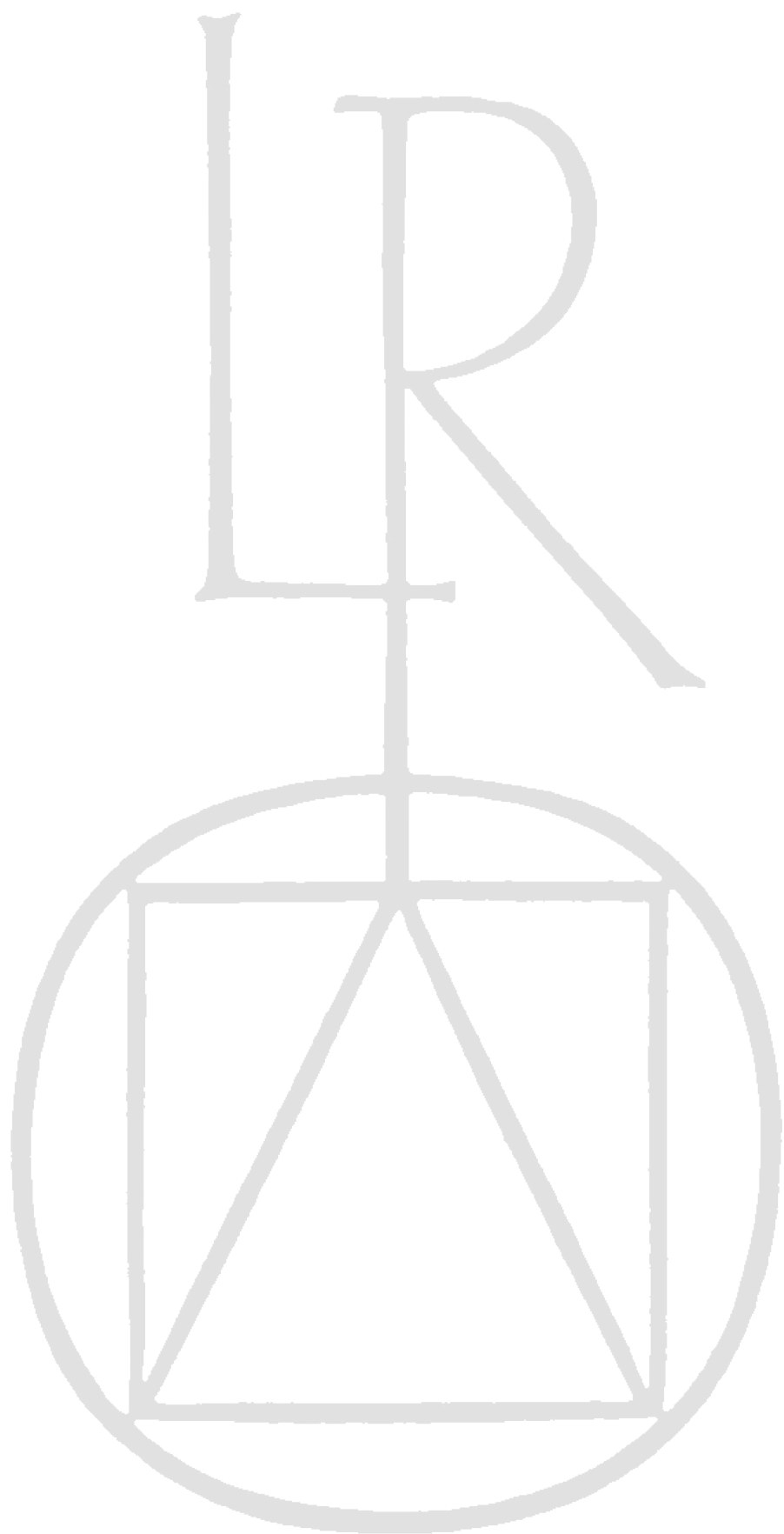


Manana Tandaschwili with her students in Ushguli, during the summer school in Mestia 2025



Manana Tandaschwili with her colleagues and students at the international symposium “Digital Caucasiology – a Change of Paradigm?” in 2023

She continues to advise national ministries, serve on international editorial boards, and speak at conferences around the world. Her current projects include the expansion of the “Rustaveli Goes Digital” corpus and several monographs. But as this Festschrift celebrates her achievements and work, it is fitting to reflect not only on what Manana Tandaschwili has achieved but on what she has made possible: a global network of scholars, a corpus of shared knowledge, and an intellectual bridge between continents, which is reflected in the contributions to this volume by her colleagues, friends and students. Her journey from Tbilisi to Frankfurt has not only traversed geography – it has reshaped the scholarly landscape of Caucasiology itself. This Festschrift honours a scholar whose work embodies rigour, interdisciplinarity, cultural advocacy, and community engagement – qualities that have redefined Caucasiology, Kartvelology, and Rustvelology, and enriched the global understanding of the Caucasus.



## Tbilisi – Frankfurt – Tbilisi

I suspect the Guinness record for flights between Germany and Georgia among Georgians belongs to Manana Tandaschwili, Georgian linguist, Caucasiologist, and professor at Goethe University Frankfurt. She visits her homeland several times a year to strengthen Georgian-German academic ties and has become a bridge between the two countries. Her work in both places extends beyond the study of the Georgian language to the popularisation of Georgian culture and science and, most importantly, to training a new generation of scholars.

Manana's scientific path began in Tbilisi. She graduated from the Department of Caucasiology, Faculty of Philology at Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University in 1983, then pursued postgraduate studies at the Georgian Academy of Sciences. In 1993 she defended her PhD thesis, "Morphonological Analysis of Kakhetian," under the supervision of Professor Tedo Uturgaidze.

Her interest in language modelling also dates from this period. After completing her postgraduate studies, she joined the Arn. Chikobava Institute of Linguistics in Professor Uturgaidze's group, where she began exploring how to connect linguistics and new technologies. In 1995 she was appointed head of the Institute's Computational Linguistics Laboratory and took an active role in organising conferences on language computerisation, whose aim was to identify intersections between language and computing. In 1999 she successfully defended her doctoral dissertation, "Basic Principles of Computer Modelling (on the Example of Georgian and Udi)," and in the same year became an Alexander von Humboldt Fellow in linguistics. This first direct encounter with European scholarship led to a two-year collaboration with German Caucasiologists Wolfgang Schulze and Jost Gippert on an electronic edition of the Udi Gospels.

From that moment a new European chapter began. After arriving at Goethe University Frankfurt as a Humboldt scholar, she became a professor there in 2002. With the active support of her German colleagues, she launched innovative projects in fields then largely new to Georgian scholarship – language documentation, corpus linguistics, and digital humanities.

Her first successful project in Germany sharpened her focus on language documentation and inspired large-scale initiatives to document Georgian and create electronic resources. Collaboration with Professor Jost Gippert became a major milestone. Early Georgian-German projects under his leadership – "Development of a Coding Standard for Iberian-Caucasian Languages," "Foundations for Modelling the Morphology of Iberian-Caucasian Languages," "Electronic Database of Published Texts of Svan and Megrelian," and ARMAZI – Caucasian Languages and Cultures: Electronic Documentation – demonstrated the need for broad Georgian participation. Manana undertook to build a bridge between research centres in Germany and Georgia: new ideas emerged, new international projects followed, and young scholars were actively involved. The electronic resources produced in these years within ARMAZI and TITUS, led by Jost Gippert together with Georgian colleagues, laid the groundwork for a major text database of Georgian – the Georgian National Corpus (GNC) – now one of the most significant online linguistic resources for the language.

In addition to these and many other projects, as a professor at the Institute of Empirical Linguistics at Goethe University Frankfurt, Manana leads the programme in Caucasiology and lectures in German. She established several seminar series that, in 2010, coalesced into the Frank-

furt Linguistic Circle. As a Georgian scholar, she is especially dedicated to promoting Georgian culture in Germany. Her literary salon “Euterpe,” founded in Frankfurt in 2010, also sought to stimulate translation; the translators and literary scholars who gathered there have translated and published numerous volumes of Georgian literature in German. Since its founding, Manana has devoted substantial time to the organisation of Georgian community life in Frankfurt: in cooperation with the mayors of Frankfurt and Tbilisi she held several Georgian Culture Days events, established a Sunday school for Georgian children, and – while doing all this – raised her three children and developed new projects. She never loosened her ties with her homeland. Her cultural and literary efforts helped lay the foundation for Georgia’s status as Guest of Honour at the Frankfurt Book Fair in 2018.

In recent years she has focused on new projects concerning the great Georgian poet Shota Rustaveli – digitising translations of his works and creating new digital research resources, such as “Rustaveli Goes Digital.” Manana has worked on this intensively, actively involving young people and using the resource to conduct corpus-linguistic research.

Knowledge transfer and dissemination are another key strand of her work. Alongside her teaching in Germany, she shares new knowledge with Georgian students, maintaining especially close ties with Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University and Batumi Shota Rustaveli State University. Since 2011 she has continuously organised international seasonal schools in Batumi and Tbilisi, as well as seminars and conferences on current topics in digital humanities. Over the years, dozens of participants in the summer and winter schools have mastered the methods of creating and using digital resources and corpus-linguistic research, and a new, “digital generation” of Kartvelologists has emerged under her guidance, which today actively uses the knowledge and experience gained in these schools in their research. Manana not only provides academic training; she also teaches young researchers to love the work they do.

She collaborates actively with German and Georgian research foundations (the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, the Volkswagen Foundation, the Shota Rustaveli National Science Foundation). Her projects build bridges – not only between countries but also between generations. They serve to popularise the Georgian language and culture and to bring Georgian research onto the international stage. The Academy of Digital Humanities, which she founded, pursues the same goal: to develop and promote digital Kartvelology, a qualitatively new form of the discipline in Georgia. The Academy conducts educational and scholarly activities, holds trainings, workshops, and master classes, collaborates with local and international organisations, and publishes two journals – *Digital Kartvelology* and *Millennium* (the latter aimed at young researchers, doctoral students, and postdoctoral fellows in the humanities and social sciences). Both journals are peer-reviewed, bilingual (Georgian and English), and published electronically; despite having published only three issues so far, they are already indexed in several international databases, including ERIHPLUS.

I am certain that this is not Manana’s “last stop.” With perseverance, tireless work, and a contagious love for her work, she will continue to fly the route Frankfurt–Tbilisi–Frankfurt, to conceptualise and implement new projects, and to devote herself to linguistics and to her homeland.

With love,

Prof. Dr. Darejan Tvaltvadze  
Dean of the Faculty of Humanities  
Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University

## თბილისი - ფრანკფურტი - თბილისი

თბილისიდან ფრანკფურტამდე და ფრანკფურტიდან თბილისამდე თვითმფრინავით მგზავრობის რეკორდი ქართველთაგან, ალბათ, მანანა თანდაშვილს ეკუთვნის, გერმანიაში მოღვაწე ქართველ ენათმეცნიერს, კავკასიოლოგს, ფრანკფურტის გოეთეს სახელობის უნივერსიტეტის პროფესორს, რომელიც წელიწადში რამდენჯერმე სტუმრობს თავის სამშობლოს, რათა ხელი შეუწყოს ქართულ-გერმანული სამეცნიერო კონტაქტების განმტკიცება-გაფარობას და ცდილობს საქართველოსა და გერმანიას შორის გადებულ ერთგვარ სამეცნიერო ხიდად იქცეს. მისი საქმიანობა გერმანიაშიც და საქართველოშიც უკავშირდება არა მხოლოდ ქართული ენის კვლევას, არამედ ქართული კულტურისა და მეცნიერების პოპულარიზაციას, და, რაც მთავარია, მეცნიერთა ახალი თაობის მომზადებაზე ზრუნვას.

მანანა თანდაშვილის სამეცნიერო კარიერა თბილისში დაიწყო. მისი „Alma Mater“ ივანე ჯავახიშვილის სახელობის თბილისის სახელმწიფო უნივერსიტეტია, რომლის ფილოლოგიის ფაკულტეტის კავკასიოლოგიის განყოფილება 1983 წელს დაასრულა. შემდეგ იყო საქართველოს მეცნიერებათა აკადემიის ასპირანტურაში სწავლის წლები და 1993 წელს პროფესორ თედო უთურგაიძის ხელმძღვანელობით დაცული საკანდიდატო დისერტაცია („კახურის მორფონოლოგიური ანალიზი“). ენის მოდელირების საკითხებით მანანას დაინტერესებაც ამ დროიდან იწყება. ასპირანტურის დამთავრების შემდეგ მანანა მუშაობას აგრძელებს არნ. ჩიქობავას სახელობის ენათმეცნიერების ინსტიტუტში, პროფესორ თედო უთურგაიძის სამეცნიერო ჯგუფში, სადაც პირველად იწყება ფიქრი და გზების ძიება, როგორ დაუკავშირონ ენათმეცნიერება და ახალი ტექნოლოგიები ერთმანეთთან. მალევე, 1995 წელს, მანანა ინიშნება ენათმეცნიერების ინსტიტუტის კომპიუტერული ლინგვისტიკის ლაბორატორიის ხელმძღვანელად; აქტიურად არის ჩართული ენის კომპიუტერიზაციის საკითხებისადმი მიძღვნილი სამეცნიერო კონფერენციების ორგანიზებაში, რომლის ძირითადი მიზანი ენისა და კომპიუტერული ტექნოლოგიების გადაკვეთის წერტილების ძიება იყო. 1999 წელს მანანამ წარმატებით დაიცვა სადოქტორო დისერტაცია თემაზე „კომპიუტერული მოდელირების ძირითადი პრინციპები (ქართული და უდიური ენების მაგალითზე)“ და იმავე წელს გახდა ალექსანდერ ფონ ჰუმბოლდტის სტიპენდიატი ენათმეცნიერების დარგში. სწორედ მაშინ მიეცა პირველად საშუალება ახალგაზრდა მკვლევარს ადგილზე გასცნობოდა ევროპელი კოლეგების საქმიანობას და გერმანელ კავკასიოლოგებთან - ვოლფგანგ შულცესა და იოსტ გიპერტთან ერთად ორი წელი ემუშავა უდიური სახარების ელექტრონული ვერსიის შექმნაზე.

ამ დროიდან დაიწყო მისი ახალი, ევროპული ცხოვრებაც. გერმანიაში, ფრანკფურტის გოეთეს უნივერსიტეტში ჰუმბოლტის სტიპენდიატის სტატუსით ჩასული ახალგაზრდა ქართველი მკვლევარი 2002 წელს ამ უნივერსიტეტის პროფესორი გახდა და გერმანელი კოლეგების აქტიური მხარდაჭერითა და მათთან ინტენსიური თანამშრომლობით შეძლო განეხორციელებინა ინოვაციური პროექტები, რომლებიც იმ დროისათვის ჩვენი მეცნიერებისთვის სრულიად ახალ დარგებს - დოკულინგვისტიკას, კორპუსლინგვისტიკას, დიგიტალურ ჰუმანიტარიას უკავშირდებოდა.

გერმანიაში განხორციელებული პირველი წარმატებული სამეცნიერო პროექტი, მალევე გადაიქცა ენის დოკუმენტირების საკითხებზე მანანას ფოკუსირების მიზეზად და ქართული ენის დოკუმენტირებისა და ელექტრონული რესურსების შექმნის მიზნით ჩაფიქრებული რამდენიმე მასშტაბური ინიციატივის ბიძგად. თანამშრომლობა პროფესორ იოსტ გიპერტთან არის ერთ-ერთი ყველაზე