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**PRESERVATION AND DESCRIPTION OF A DIGITALIZED FONDS – PERSONAL ARCHIVES OF KHARITON SHAVISHVILI  
(Case study from the National Archives of Georgia)**

**Abstract:**

The article describes the work on the description of the personal fonds of the Georgian public figure and writer Khariton Shavishvili, which is kept by the office of the United Nations and was transferred to Georgia in the form of digital copies. Personal papers contain a variety of documents: up to 30.000 handwritten and printed pages. Among them, almost 55% are in French, 40% in Georgian and less than 5% in other languages. Documents include correspondence, literary works and other writings. In the article the author presents the challenges and the complexity of processing digitalized archives, a work already lasting two years and is not finished yet.

**Ke words:**

digitalization of documents, digitalized fonds, description of archives, Khariton Shavishvili, first democratic republic of Georgia, government in exile

**Izveček:**

**Hramba in popisovanje digitaliziranega fonda – osebni arhiv Kharitona Shavishvilija (študija primera Narodnega arhiva Gruzije)**

Prispevek obravnava strokovno obdelavo osebnega fonda gruzijske javne osebe, pisatelja Kharitona Shavishvilija, ki ga hrani tuja institucija in je bil v Gruzijo prenešen v obliki digitalnih kopij. Osebni arhiv zajema veliko količino dokumentov – preko 30.000 ročno pisanih oz. tipkanih strain. Med njimi jih je 55 % v francoskem jeziku, 40 % v Gruzijem in manj kot 5 % v drugih jezikih. Arhiv sestavljajo korespondenca, literarna dela in druga pisanja. Prispevek prikazuje izzive in kompleksnost strokovne obdelave digitaliziranega gradiva, dela, ki traja že dve leti in še ni končano.

**Ključne besede:**

digitalizacija dokumentov, digitaliziran fond, popis arhivskega gradiva, Khariton Shavishvili, prva demokratična republika Gruzija, vlada v izgnanstvu

In 2015, the National Archives of Georgia received the scanned copies of the archival fonds of a Georgian public figure and writer Khariton Shavishvili from the library of the United Nations office in Geneva. The above mentioned figure was appointed as a Georgian representative in the League of Nations in 1918 and held the position till 1934. In the same year, the League of Nations recognized Georgia as a part of USSR and his

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mission was finished, but Shavishvili still lived in Europe<sup>1</sup> and helped the citizens of Georgia to use his international contacts by the end of his closing years. Shavishvili died in 1975 in his 90s.

Shavishvili had no descendants, so his belongings were transferred to the city and his archives was sent to the library of the UN office since this organization was successor of the Leagues of Nations. The library preserved these papers in a proper way but has not described them. In the 2000's, a Georgian scholar worked on this archives and systematized only the correspondence in Georgian language according to the sender and the date. Other papers were put in boxes without any additional information about them.

The government of Georgia, Minister of Justice of the country and the National Archives held negotiations with UN office for the period of 3 years, after choosing the best option to scan and transfer the copies of documents from Switzerland to Georgia. By a mutual agreement, Georgian specialists went to Geneva and scanned all the files. The Georgian side is obliged to describe digital copies in 3 languages (Georgian, French and English), systematize them and send hand-out to UN office. After that, they will also do the same work with papers to systematize them. The main problems, which occurred during our work were big amounts of documents, the necessity to scan documents in high resolution (.TIFF format images), multilingual material that required more than one person to work on them and lack of experience working with digital archives. In our paper we will talk about these problems and actions we have undertaken to settle them.

## 1 HISTORICAL INFORMATION

Georgian diplomat, scholar and writer Khariton Shavishvili was born in a small village of Georgia in 1886. In the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century, like many other young people, he was involved in revolutionary activities which emerged on the whole territory of the Russian Empire. For a short time in 1906, he was imprisoned. In 1908, he managed to go to exile in Switzerland and met top revolutionaries: Lenin, Plekhanov and Martov<sup>2</sup>. After this exile he never returned to his homeland and worked in Europe.

Between 1918 and 1921, during the brief independence of the Georgian Republic, Shavishvili was appointed as a representative of the country in the Nations Committee of the League of Nations. Georgia was struggling for the recognition of its independence by the major countries and the League of Nations as well. Besides the other Georgian diplomat Mikhail Sumbatashvili, he had established the Committee of Assistance of the First Democratic Republic of Georgia in Bern. In both occasions his main point was to gain the recognition of the country, to help Georgian military personnel, who was not able to return back home after the WWI and to establish international contacts.

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<sup>1</sup> *Communist state and Bolshevik regime expatriated all the people who served in the government of the Independent Georgia.*

<sup>2</sup> *Later Shavishvili described this period in his work: "Russian revolutionaries in Geneva in 1908". The Book is not published and a printed version is kept in his private archival fonds.*

In February and March 1921, the Red Army of Soviet Russia entered Georgia and occupied the whole country. While rescuing lives and with a possibility to continue the struggle from abroad, Georgian legitimate government exiled to France. These people moved their families, took archives, museum artefacts with them in exile. With the help of the French government and other international organizations, Georgian government in exile bought a small chateau in the outskirts of Paris, Leuville sur-orge and continued their activities there.

After this rapid changes, the whole new class of Georgian emigrants emerged in Europe. Khariton Shavishvili, who was the only person to work with organizations in Geneva, became one of the most important persons for the whole class. His contacts with the League of Nations, International Committee of the Red Cross, and International Council of Refugees gave him the opportunity to help Georgian emigrants in every emerged problem.

On a more important matter was the recognition of the Soviet Union by the League of Nations. It happened in 1934 so defacto before this year Georgia had lost its state sovereignty but country had a representative in the committee of Nations. Unfortunately for the small states, Soviet Union gained recognition from the League of Nations in 1934 with the borders that included Georgia, therefore this small reliance was lost. But even after this, Shavishvili continued to help his compatriots owing his diplomatic and personal relations. He and his friend, the famous politician Jean Marten, established a "Georgian Assistance Committee", the organization that worked on similar cases as Shavishvili did before, while on his official mission.

In his later life, Khariton Shavishvili has not stopped working on Georgian issues. He published articles, wrote books and scientific papers about illegality of Georgian occupation. He died in 1975 and his papers – a huge mass of letters, articles and official documents were sent to the UN office in Geneva, where they are still preserved up to the present time.

## **2 AMOUNT AND THE STRUCTURE OF THE DOCUMENTS**

As we already mentioned, the total amount of documents is 31,389 files. The files are arranged in 32 general folders and 692 sub-folders. These 692 items will form an archival fonds. The work was provided by the Georgian scholar, Rusudan Sharadze, in the 1990s who worked on her Ph.D. topic in Geneva and rearranged these documents. She put the letters of people together, however this was mechanical and not scientific work because she did not describe any of the documents.

The structure of documents is diverse and sometimes complicated:

1. The major part of the fonds includes letters sent to Shavishvili - after examining materials, we divided this part into several parts:
  - 1.1 Letters in Georgian concerning his major work as a representative of Georgia and official letters sent to him from the members of the Georgian government in exile;

- 1.2 Other official letters in Georgian from Georgians who mainly ask for help on various occasions, generally for immigration in Switzerland or help with receiving various documents;
  - 1.3 Private letters in Georgian sent from the members of the Georgian government in exile;
  - 1.4 Other private letters in Georgian from various people;
  - 1.5 Official letters in French and other foreign languages;
  - 1.6 Private letters in French and other foreign languages.
2. Other major part consists of letters sent from Chavichvili (all the letters he sent he also chronicled in notebooks). This part includes Georgian and French letters.
  3. His writings: literary, scientific works; scientific and newspaper articles;
  4. Various printed material collected by Chavichvili: newspapers, programs, postcards etc.

As can be seen, there are lots of different materials and sometimes it is hard to define how to categorize the letters, especially when the letters concern the same persons but discuss different topics. Also, his chronicled letters mainly represent the answers to the letters he received before. There was also a big challenge to link answer-letters to the questions –our group of archivists and scholars spent the majority of time identifying which letters were linked to each other.

### 3 ACTIONS UNDERTAKEN TO DESCRIBE ARCHIVAL FONDS/ FUTURE PLANS

Because of the amount of papers, the fonds was divided into several parts by three historians who specialize in the mentioned period. The major part, French documents, were given to two of them and the Georgian part was made by one person. All of the documents are described in the Georgian language and the French part – in French. After finishing these duties, all of the descriptions should be translated to English and sent to the library of UN office.

Each description looks like this:

საქ. N	ძველი N	საქმის შინაარსი	კიდური თარიღები	ფაილ. რაოდ
	P_24A F.146	გრიგოლ რობაქიძის წერილები შავიშვილისადმი: მისი წიგნების გამოცემის; გაჭირვებული მდგომარეობის; ახალ მისამართზე გადასვლის და სხვა პირადულ საკითხებზე (18 წერილი). ხელნაწერი. ქართულ ენაზე.	05.02.1946- 11.02.1963	34

item N	Folder N	Content	date	N of files
	P_24A F.146	Letter of writer Grigol Robakidze to Shavishvili: About printing his books; About his financial pressure; About changing his home address and other conditions of his life. 18 letters totally. Document type: Manuscript. Language: Georgian.	05.02.1946- 11.02.1963	34

In other cases, archival management in post-Soviet countries naturally does not foresee details like number of files. The numbering in archives was provided for sheets of papers and not for every list. This case is a violation of standard archival rules, but it could not be done in a different way. Also, the item number column is not filled, because we keep it open until the whole work is made and then arrange numbers for documents.

For the future, this material gives many opportunities for archives and scholars for scientific and popular publications, exhibitions etc. Many hidden details from the period was also found up to this time, for example, it was known that the polish politician and anti-Soviet leader, Joseph Pilsudski, was actively helping Georgian government, but there was no evidence. From the letters of Shavishvili, we have already acknowledged that this is a fact and not fiction.

## POVZETEK

### HRAMBA IN POPISOVANJE DIGITALIZIRANEGA FONDA – OSEBNI ARHIV KHARITONA SHAVISHVILIJ (ŠTUDIJA PRIMERA NARODNEGA ARHIVA GRUZIJE)

Prispevek obravnava strokovno obdelavo osebnega arhiva javne osebe, ki ga hrani tuja institucija in je bil v Gruzijo prenešen v obliki digitalnih kopij. Osebni arhiv zajema veliko količino dokumentov – preko 30.000 ročno pisanih oz. tipkanih strani. Med njimi jih je 55 % v francoskem jeziku, 40 % v Gruzijškem in manj kot 5 % v drugih jezikih. Arhiv sestavljajo korespondenca, literarna dela in druga pisanja. Prispevek poskuša prikazati izzive in kompleksnost strokovne obdelave dvoletnega dela, ki še ni končano.

Leta 2015 je Narodni arhiv Gruzije od knjižnice Združenih narodov v Ženevi prevzel skenirane kopije arhivskega fonda gruzijskega pisatelja Kharitona Shavishvilija. Shavishvili je bil leta 1918 imenovan za gruzijskega predstavnika v Ligi narodov in je na tem položaju ostal do leta 1934, ko je Liga narodov Gruzijo priznala kot del Rusije in je njegova funkcija prenehala. Shavishvili je ostal v Evropi in pomagal državljanom Gruzije s svojimi mednarodnimi stiki. Umril je leta 1975.

Shavishvili ni imel potomcev, zato so bili njegovi osebni dokumenti poslani v knjižnico Združenih narodov, ki je nasledila Ligo narodov. Knjižnica je dokumente

ohranila, vendar niso bili popisani. V začetku 21. stoletja je gruzijska raziskovalka delala na tem gradivu in sistematizirala korespondenco v gruzijskem jeziku glede na pošiljatelja in datum. Ostali dokumenti so bili zloženi v škatle brez kakršnihkoli informacij o njih.

Gruzijska vlada, ministrstvo za pravosodje in Narodni arhiv so se tri leta pogajali z Združenimi narodi in končno dosegli dogovor o skeniranju in prenosu kopij iz Švice v Gruzijo. Trije gruzijski specialisti so tako v Ženevi poskenirali vse dokumente. Gruzijska stran se je obvezala, da bo popisala digitalne kopije v treh jezikih (gruzijskem, francoskem in angleškem), jih uredila in poslala ZN, ki bo potem uredil še izvorno, papirno dokumentacijo.

Glavni problemi, ki so se pojavljali pri delu, so bili velika količina dokumentov, potreba skeniranja dokumentov v visoki resoluciji, večjezično gradivo, kar je zahtevalo več kot enega strokovnjaka, in pomanjkanje izkušenj pri delu z digitalnim gradivom.