

## Document Citation

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SOVIET CINEMA: YESTERDAY AND TODAY

Thursday, October 27 - 8pm

MY GRANDMOTHER

Directed by Kote Mikaberidze

Released in 1929

Running Time: 60 minutes

A double-bill of silent Georgian films not to be missed on any account. The first, shown for the first time in the West, is a genuine piece of grotesquerie descended from Gogol and the Soviet Eccentric cinema--a riotous, anti-bureaucratic satire taking in all kinds of advanced filmic devices like stop-motion, bits of puppetry and animation and expressionist decor.

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(SALT FOR SAVENTIA)

CAST: The people of Svanetia, a valley in the Caucasus

CREDITS: Director: Mikhail Kalatozov; Screenplay: Mikhail Kalatozov, based on an idea by Sergei Tretyakov; Photography: Mikhail Kalatozov and M. Gegelashvili

Released in 1930

Running Time: 60 minutes

This documentary, originally based on Tretyakov's pre-written script about Svanetia, is as memorable as Bunuel's LAND WITHOUT BREAD. The people of Svanetia, an isolated valley, 6,000 feet up in the Caucasus, were then as backward as the people of Las Hurdes in Bunuel's film. They were totally cut off from the outside world except for a single mountain pass that was open only during the brief snowless period.

The official catalogue description characterizes life there as "patriarchal, primitive; the struggle for existence among the snow-capped mountains entails such constant want and hunger, and particularly, the tormenting hunger for salt, that each new birth is regarded as a terrible curse, which death becomes a solemn feast."

The hopeless life of the inhabitants is dominated by their need for salt, which they must carry on their back across the mountains, where even in the middle of summer, snow still falls. Many of the images are Bunuelian; a woman, close to childbirth, driven from her house; a horse galloping until its heart bursts; the pagan offering of a slaughtered horse; a cow thirstily drinking human urine for its salt; a new-born torn apart by a dog; a widow dripping her milk into the grave; money counted on a crucifix. The last part, urging the construction of a road to bring salt and civilization to Svanetia is unnecessary; as Harry Potamkin put it "the entire film cries that convincingly enough."

--Georges Sadoul, Dictionary of Films

The director Mikahail Kalatozov was born December 28, 1903. First he studied commerce, then turned to cinematography. His training and early work with a camera was a strong influence on his method of direction. In 1925 he returned to native Tiflis and joined the young Georgian film industry, working under Perestiani and Kuleshov. His first



Film was a historical documentary on the role of the Mensheviks in Georgia during the Civil War. Next came tonight's film SALT FOR SVANETIA, which when it first appeared was criticised for its naturalism, and so was not shown much, but today in the Soviet Union and abroad, it's recognized as a masterpiece. In more recent years Kalatozov made THE CRANES ARE FLYING (1957) (seen in this series on Oct. 20) and THE RED TENT (1969).

Program notes by Donald Deschner

Program presented in association with the Los Angeles Film Exposition and the American Film Institute