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FRAGMENTS OF ST. JOHN'S GOSPEL
IN THE LANGUAGE OF THE
CAUCASIAN ALBANIANS*

Jost Gippert

The discovery of the first manuscript remains of the Caucasian “Albanians” in St. Catherine’s Monastery on Mt. Sinai has provided a solid basis for the decipherment of the “Albanian” script and language. In an international cooperation project devoted to this task,¹ the two Georgian palimpsest manuscripts in question (Sin. N 13 and N 55)² have been thoroughly studied and analysed and a full account of their content has been published two years ago.³ In the present paper, I intend to summarise the findings concerning the fragments of the “Albanian” version of St. John’s Gospel that are contained in the palimpsests.

The edition project has proven beyond doubt that the two Sinai manuscripts (N 13 and N 55) comprise, as palimpsests, 166 leaves pertaining to at least six different original manuscripts, two of them Armenian, one Georgian, one Aramaic, and two written in the Albanian script and language. Of the latter two originals, one is a lectionary manuscript containing readings from three Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke) as well as Acts and Epistles (St. Paul’s and Catholic), plus a few verses from the Psalms and a short reading from Isaiah. The 64 folios of the lectionary manuscript have been preserved well enough to provide the basis for the decipherment of the script and the language, and more than 95 % of its contents have been re-established with certainty. The second original manuscript written in the Albanian script has been much more difficult to account for, given that it was erased much more rigorously than the

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¹ The project was financed by the Volkswagen Foundation from 2003 to 2007; the project members were Zaza Aleksidze, Jean-Pierre Mahé, Wolfgang Schulze, Manana Tandaschwili, and myself. The project results here reported are the common property of the project members.

² Cf. Aleksidze (1997, 2001, 2003) and Aleksidze/Mahé (2003) for details.

³ Cf. Gippert, Schulze et al. 2009.

lectionary manuscript for being re-used as a palimpsest. Nevertheless it is clear now that it was part of a Gospel manuscript, the 58 folios extant representing fragments of the Gospel of John. The following passages have been identified with certainty: Jo. 1,45–3,9; 3,27–4,10; 4,35–4,47; 5,17–7,17; 8,14–10,6; 11,7–11,29; 11,52–13,11; 15,13–16,22; 18,32–20,29. Possibly the first and the final leaves of St. John's Gospel (A40–A47 and B39–36,⁴ containing Jo. 1,1–1,25 and 21,18–25) have also been preserved in this set; their identification is not certain though.

Calculating the amount of text contained in the individual folios that have been preserved, we arrive at 47 original folios covering the whole Gospel of John. If we further take into account that the last folio preserved of the set (B39–B36) seems to contain the beginning of a colophon (or other additional material) and that the set may have comprised one more folio at the beginning (containing a title or the like, now lost), we are led to assume that the given manuscript was confined to St. John's Gospel, consisting of 48 folios distributed among 6 gatherings of 8 folios each. The presumptive distribution is illustrated in Table I below.⁵

It must be stated, however, that in all the passages that have been preserved, it is hardly ever more than 50% of the contents of a given page that can be read. In a few cases, it is not the text proper but only the Ammonian section numbers (arranged left to the columns) or the Eusebian apparatus (in the bottom margin) which provide the basis for the identification of a given text passage.

The bad state of the Gospel manuscript fragments notwithstanding, the textual remains they reveal do admit of investigating the relationship of the given text version with those that might be assumed to have been used as its models, viz. the Greek, Armenian, Georgian, and Syriac Gospels. A very important indication in this respect is the name of the lake Siloam mentioned in Jo. 9,7 and 9,11, which appears as ⟨šiloham-⟩ and ⟨šilohan-⟩ in the Albanian text. It is clear that with its initial ⟨š-⟩ the Albanian form cannot represent the Greek form Σιλοάμ directly as there is no reason to assume a substitution of a Greek ⟨s-⟩ by an Albanian ⟨š-⟩, given that a sequence ⟨si⟩ does occur in Albanian words (cf., e.g., *owski* 'soon(er)' in Jo. 11,29 and 20,4) as well as foreign names or terms such as *Simon* = Simon (Jo. 13,6 and elsewhere) or *eklesi* 'church,

⁴ As in the edition, A and B are used hereafter to denote the two catalogued manuscripts, N 13 and N 55. Note that one folio each of the original manuscript has yielded two leaves of the palimpsest (all folios turned by 90°).

⁵ In the Table, elements printed in italics have been reallocated after the publication of the edition.

Table I: Presumable distribution of palimpsest folios among original gatherings

(Title)	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	
	1,1-25 A40 ^r A40 ^v A47 ^v A47 ^r	1,25-45 A1 ^v A1 ^r	1,45-2,15 A6 ^r A6 ^v	2,15-3,9 A7 ^r A7 ^v [A0 ^v A0 ^r]	3,9-26	3,27-4,11 A41 ^r A41 ^v A46 ^v A46 ^r	4,11-31
4,31-48 B18 ^r B21 ^v B21 ^r	4,48-5,17	5,17-35 A100 ^r A100 ^v A97 ^v A97 ^r	5,35-6,9 A101 ^r A101 ^v A96 ^v A96 ^r	6,9-27 A107 ^v A107 ^r	6,27-48 A99 ^r A99 ^v A98 ^v A98 ^r	6,48-66	6,66-7,17 B17 ^r B17 ^v B22 ^v B22 ^r
7,17-37	7,37-8,14	8,14-31 A19 ^r A19 ^v A20 ^v A20 ^r	8,32-50 A50 ^r A50 ^v A55 ^v A55 ^r	8,51-9,9 A51 ^r A51 ^v A54 ^v A54 ^r	9,9-27 A18 ^r A18 ^v A21 ^v A21 ^r	9,27-10,6 A74 ^r A74 ^v A102 ^v A102 ^r	10,7-27
10,27-11,7	11,7-30 A65 ^r A65 ^v A60 ^v A60 ^r	11,30-47 B1 ^r B1 ^v B5 ^v B5 ^r	11,48-12,6 B12 ^r B12 ^v B9 ^v B9 ^r	12,6-26 B11 ^r B11 ^v B10 ^v B10 ^r	12,26-44 B54 ^r B54 ^v B55 ^v B55 ^r	12,44-13,11 A66 ^r A66 ^v A59 ^v A59 ^r	13,11-28
13,28-14,7	14,7-24	14,24-15,13 A30 ^r A30 ^v A25 ^v A25 ^r	15,13-16,5 A31 ^r A31 ^v A24 ^v A24 ^r	16,5-22 A31 ^r A31 ^v A24 ^v A24 ^r	16,22-17,6	17,6-25	17,25-18,16
18,16-31 B40 ^r B35 ^v B35 ^r	18,32-19,7 A61 ^r A61 ^v A64 ^v A64 ^r	19,7-22 A17 ^r A17 ^v A22 ^v A22 ^r	19,23-38 B13 ^v B13 ^r B8 ^v B8 ^r	19,38-20,14 B14 ^r B14 ^v B7 ^v B7 ^r	20,15-29 A16 ^r A16 ^v A23 ^v A23 ^r	20,30-21,15	21,15-25(Col. B39 ^v B39 ^r B36 ^v B36 ^r)

congregation' representing Gk. ἐκκλησία (~ Georg. *eklesia-*, vs. Arm. *ekelec'i* 'id.'). The term is not attested in St. John's Gospel but in the Lectionary ms. in Mt. 16,18, Act. 12,5, Eph. 5,25 and elsewhere). The case of Alb. *Šiloham* is all the more astonishing as the form also contrasts with its Georgian equivalent, which is ⟨siloam-⟩ in all ancient redactions (Adish, Protovulgate, Athonite Vulgate), as well as the form occurring in the Armenian tradition, i.e., ⟨silovam-⟩. As a matter of fact, it is the Syriac form ⟨šylwh̄⟩, i.e. /šilōhā/, which comes closest to Alb. ⟨šiloham-⟩.

A similar case is provided by the Albanian rendering of the name of the prophet Isaiah which occurs in the form ⟨ešaya⟩ in Jo. 12,38, thus opposing itself to Gk. Ἰσαΐας, Arm. *Ēsaya*, and Georg. *Esaia/Esaya* but matching Syr. *Eša'yā*. In the given case, there is further a remarkable contrast between the Gospel and the Lectionary manuscripts in that the prophet's name is spelt ⟨isa⟩ in the latter (in the genitive form *Isai*, attested in the text of Lk. 4,17 and a liturgical gloss pertaining to that passage, as well as the lection title of Is. 35,3–8, the only OT pericope preserved in the palimpsest). Nevertheless we can exclude that the Albanian text of the Gospel of John might reflect a Syriac model directly, given that it agrees with the Greek, Armenian, and Georgian versions in adding the explanatory note "which is translated 'the sent one'" after the first occurrence of the name *Šiloham* (in Jo. 9,7)—a note which is missing in the Syriac (Peshitta) text. Instead we may assume that the Albanian text reflects an older stratum of the "Caucasian" Bible translation which was not adapted as much to the Greek tradition as the NT text of the Armenian and Georgian "vulgates" was. This is all the more probable as the Lectionary ms. contains Biblical name forms with ⟨š̄⟩, too; cf., e.g., *Eliša* = Eliseus (Lk. 4,26; cf. Syr. *Eliša'*, vs. Arm. *Elise*, Gk. Ἐλισαῖος, Georg. *Elise*), *Yeš* = Jesse (gen. *Yeši* in Act. 13,22; cf. Syr. *Yišay*, vs. Arm. *Yesse*, Gk. Ἰεσσαί, Georg. *Iese*), or *Yešo* = Joshua (in a liturgical gloss pertaining to Heb. 13,16; cf. Syr. *Yešu* vs. Arm. *Yesow*, Gk. Ἰησοῦς, Georg. *Iso*). The assumption that these forms are evidence for an older stratum is not contradicted by more common names with ⟨s⟩ such as *Elisabet* = Elisabeth (cf. Arm. *Elišabet'*, Gk. Ἐλισάβητ, Georg. *Elisabet, Elisabed* vs. Syr. *Elišba'*) or Simon (cf. Arm. *Simovn*, Gk. Σίμων, Georg. *Simon* vs. *Šəm'un*) as these may have been adapted to Greek usage just like the Armenian and Georgian "vulgate" texts were.

Proceeding beyond this, there is good reason to assume that the extant Albanian NT translation was modelled upon an ancient Armenian version which is no longer extant as such. This is not only suggested by a

few common words that are exclusive for Armenian and Albanian (note, e.g., *vardapet* 'teacher' in Jo. 11,28),⁶ but also by the text of the lectionary, where the differences between the Armenian text on the one hand and the Greek and partly, the Georgian texts on the other hand are extreme, esp. within the readings from St. Paul's Epistles; here, the Albanian text usually follows the extant Armenian version both in its wording and in its syntax as far as it can. Nevertheless the Albanian text of St. John's Gospel exhibits some remarkable divergences as to its Armenian counterpart that need further investigation. One such divergence is found in Jo. 5,28 where the Albanian text starts with the prohibitive formula "do not marvel (at this, for the time will be coming)" (*ee ma-qa-nan-amec-hē hegal-anaķe p'i*), thus agreeing with the Greek, the Syriac, and the two versions of the Georgian "Vulgate" while the Armenian text (and the Georgian "Adish" redaction matching it) have an interrogative formula "why (lit. what) do you marvel (at this, for the time is coming)" (Arm. *and ayn zi' zarmanayk': Zi ekesc'ē zamanak / Georg. C ese raysa giķwrs? rametu movides žami*, vs. Georg. DE etc. *nu giķwrn ese, rametu movals žami*, Gk. *μη θαυμάζετε τοῦτο, ὅτι ἔρχεται ὥρα* etc.).

On the other hand, there are some clear coincidences with the Armenian version within St. John's Gospel, too. One indication of this type is met with in Jo. 6,42 where the two texts agree in omitting the name of Jesus in the phrase "isn't that Jesus, the son of Joseph" (Alb. *te o-ne o ġar Yosēpi / Arm. oč' sa ē ordin Yovsep'ow*), thus opposing themselves to the Greek, Syriac, and Georgian versions (Gk. *Οὐχ οὗτός ἐστιν Ἰησοῦς ὁ υἱὸς Ἰωσήφ* etc.). Furthermore, the "Albanian" palimpsest matches the Armenian text (and the Georgian of the so-called "Protovulgate") in the given verse in not mentioning the Saviour's mother, continuing with "of whom we know the father" alone (Alb. *ža aa-hanayoyake-ža o dex / Arm. zoroy mer gitemk' zhayrn*, vs. Gk. *οὐ ἡμεῖς οἶδαμεν τὸν πατέρα καὶ τὴν μητέρα* etc.). It is interesting that at the given position there is a marginal gloss that can be read as ⟨γ̄s⟩, i.e. the (regular) abbreviation of the name of Jesus; if this is true, we have an indication here that the text was re-adapted to another (Greek?) model in quite the same way as the famous Armenian Gospel manuscript of Echmiadzin was "corrected" by adding (the abbreviated genitive of) 'God', ⟨āγ̄⟩, in a marginal gloss in Jo. 5,44. It must be stated, however, that such coincidences cannot be taken to prove

⁶ Note that the same word is spelt *vardapet* in the Lectionary ms. (Mt. 22, 24,1. Cor. 12,28 and elsewhere).—For a preliminary account of such "common" words (mostly of Iranian origin) cf. Gippert (2005) and (2007).

the dependence of the Albanian text from the Armenian, given that there are some Greek manuscripts, too, which mention neither Jesus nor his mother in the given context, so that this might as well be due to a common (Greek) source such as the Codex Sinaiticus, which reads $\text{οὐ ημὸς οὐδαμὲν καὶ τὸν πατέρα}$.⁷

A similar case is Jo. 8,40 where the Albanian text agrees with the Armenian (plus the Georgian Adish redaction) in saying “which I have heard **from my father**” (Alb. *dexoc bezi ihē-h~ḱe-za* / Arm. *zor loway i hawrē immē* / Georg. *C ray mesma mamisagan čemisa*), thus opposing itself to the Greek, Syriac, and Georgian vulgate versions which have “**from God**” instead (Gk. ἦν ἠκούσα **παρὰ τοῦ θεοῦ** etc.). Here, too, we do find some Greek manuscripts which support the “Armeno-Albanian” tradition in having τοῦ πατρὸς (μου) instead of τοῦ θεοῦ .⁸

A peculiar problem is the rendering of the coin mentioned in Jo. 6,7, which is a ‘Denar’ (δηνάριον, *dynr-*) in the Greek and Syriac texts, and a *dahekan* / *drahkan-* in the Armenian and Georgian versions.⁹ Here, the Albanian text has a *hapax legomenon* which was hesitatingly restored as ⟨zaizowzńa⟩ in the edition, with ⟨-ńa⟩ representing a common derivative suffix. In the edition,¹⁰ we proposed to regard this as a derivate of the (Latinized) name of the Byzantine Emperor Mezezius (> **mezaizowz-*), who reigned at about 669 AD and who was an Armenian by his provenance (Mžež Gnuni), the coin being named after the ruler. If this were right, we would arrive at a reasonable *terminus ad quem* for the emergence of the Albanian Gospel text. This assumption has raised serious doubts, however, as the Emperor in question, who was enthroned in Sicily and ruled for but a few months before he was killed at the same site, is not likely to have had any impact on the Caucasian world. This is also true for the coins (*solidi*) that were issued in his name in Sicily.¹¹ It is therefore indi-

⁷ With καὶ dotted to indicate deletion and καὶ τὴν μητέρα added in the margin by a later hand; cf. <http://codexsinaiticus.org/de/manuscript.aspx?book=36&chapter=6&lid=de&side=r&verse=42&zoomSlider=0>.—Swanson (1995, 81) lists at least one other manuscript missing “mother” in the given context, viz. W = the Freer Gospels of Washington.

⁸ Among them the Koridethi Gospels (Θ), a IXth c. ms. of Caucasian provenance; cf. Swanson 1995, 118.

⁹ Cf. Hübschmann 1897, 133, who connects the Armenian word with New Pers. *dah* ‘ten’ and *dahgānī* ‘genus monetae aureae antiquis temporis usitatae’, and Andronikašvili 1966, 314, who explains the consonant cluster of Georg. *drahkanī* by analogy after its quasi-homonym *drama-* ‘drachm’.

¹⁰ Gippert, Schulze et al. (2009), Vol. I, I-30; cf. also Gippert / Schulze (2007), 201–211.

¹¹ My thanks are due to Werner Seibt and Nikolaus Schindel of the Numismatic

cated to look for another interpretation. This can indeed be arrived at by reading not **zaizowzña* but *dai-zowzña*, the latter element reflecting the Syriac equivalent of the drachm, *zuzā*.¹² The leading element would in this case be the same as in *dai-zde*, the Albanian word for 'gold' (Heb. 9,4), which is likely to be composed of *dai* 'green' and *z(i)de* 'iron'.¹³ *dai-zowzña* might then be a genitive case form of a stem **dai-zowz* denoting the 'denar' as a 'green', i.e. 'copper' or 'bronze' coin equivalent to a drachm, matching the genitives of *δηνάριον*, *dahekan* and *drahkani* in the Greek, Armenian and Georgian versions ('bread of 200 denars').¹⁴ To illustrate this, the sentence in question may be restored and arranged interlinearly as displayed in Table II below. As the arrangement shows, it is the Armenian version again that comes closest to the Albanian text, at least in the word order, with Alb. *ḡow* ~ Arm. *bawakan* 'enough' being placed at the end.

Table II: Jo. 6,7 in interlinear arrangement

Alb.	<i>viç-ḡoar</i>	<i>dai-zowzña</i>	<i>ḡowm</i>	<i>te-n-</i>	<i>-ḡ̃a</i>	<i>ḡow</i>
Arm.	<i>erkeriwr</i> 200	<i>dahekani</i> of-denars	<i>hac'</i> bread	<i>čē</i> not-is	<i>doc'a</i> to them	<i>bawakan</i> enough
Georg. C	<i>orasisa</i>	<i>drahknisay</i>	<i>ḡuri</i>	<i>ver</i>	<i>eḡos</i>	<i>mat</i>
Georg. DE	<i>orasisa</i> of-200	<i>drahknisa</i> of-denars	<i>ḡuri</i> bread	<i>ver</i> not	<i>kma ars</i> enough-is	<i>amata</i> to them
Greek	<i>Διακοσίωv</i> of-200	<i>δηναρίων</i> of-denars	<i>ἄρτοι</i> breads	<i>οὐκ</i> not	<i>ἄρκοῦσιν</i> enough-are	<i>αὐτοῖς</i> to them
Syriac	<i>m'tyn</i> 200	<i>dynryn</i> denars	<i>lh̄m'</i> bread	<i>l'</i> not	<i>spq</i> enough-is	<i>lhwn</i> to them

Commission of the Austrian Academy of Sciences who drew our attention to these problems.

¹² Proposal kindly offered by N. Schindel, personal communication of April 21, 2010.—Syriac *zuzā* (for which cf. Brockelmann 1928, 191b) does not occur in the present passage (where the Syriac text has *dyn'ryn* instead) nor anywhere else in the NT but, e.g., in Ex. 30,13 where the Greek text has ὀβολος; cf. further Luther 1997, 40 n. 47 as to Syr. *zuzā* and Ebeling et al. 1989, 513–514 as to Aramaic *zūzu* (with further reference). The Aramaic word is also used, in the form ZWZN, as the ideogram for Middle Persian *drahm*, cf. MacKenzie (1971), 27; for attestations cf. <http://titus.fkidg1.uni-frankfurt.de/database/titusinx/titusinx.asp?LXLANG=922&LXWORD=ZWZN&LCPL=1&TCPL=1&C=A&T=0&LMT=100&K=0&MM=0&QF=1>.

¹³ Gippert, Schulze et al. (2009), Vol. I, IV-13.

¹⁴ Proposal arrived at in personal communication with W. Schulze (8.–9.5.2010).

Taking these considerations into account, it is clear that the *terminus ad quem* provided by the rulership of Mezezius has to be given up. The dating of the Albanian palimpsests must therefore remain open until scientific methods as to their analysis can be applied.

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