

Achtung!

Dies ist eine Internet-Sonderausgabe des Kapitels

„Caucasian Albanian Manuscripts“

von Jost Gippert (2014).

Sie sollte nicht zitiert werden. Zitate sind der Originalausgabe in

Comparative Oriental Manuscript Studies. An Introduction

Hamburg: COMSt 2015, 43

zu entnehmen.

Attention!

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Jost Gippert, Frankfurt 2015

3.4. Caucasian Albanian manuscripts (JG)

The conversion of the southern Caucasus to Christianity by the end of the fourth century brought about the emergence of three manuscript traditions, two of which developed continuously for about 1,500 years, namely those of the Armenians and the Georgians, while the third one, that of the so-called Caucasian Albanians, ended before the turn of the first millennium by consequence of the conquest of the region by the Arabs. The very fact that the eastern neighbours of Armenians and Georgians, styled *albanoi* in Greek sources, developed a Christian literature in their own language and script in the fifth century under the influence of Mesrop Maštoc', the inventor of the Armenian script, was known only from historiographical sources until 1937, when a specimen of an Albanian alphabet was detected in an Armenian encyclopaedic manuscript of the thirteenth century (Yerevan Matenadaran, 7117; Abulaže 1938; Šanize 1938; Gippert et al. 2009, I, II-1-5); a few epigraphic artefacts that were unearthed in excavations in present-day Azerbaijan in the late 1940s confirmed the use of that alphabet for the first time (Gippert et al. 2009, I, xx–xxi and II-85–91). It took another fifty years for the first (and only) manuscript remnants of Caucasian Albanian to be detected, in the lower text of two Georgian palimpsest codices discovered among the New Finds of the library of St Catherine's Monastery on Mount Sinai. The decipherment of these palimpsests, initiated by Z. Aleksizė in 1994 (Aleksizė – Mahé 1997; Gippert et al. 2009, I, xx–xxiii) and accomplished in the course of an international cooperation project between 1998 and 2008 (cf. the edition published by Gippert et al. 2009), brought to light that the 242 pages of the manuscripts Sinai, St Catherine, New Finds, georg. N13 and N55 that have an underwriting in the Albanian language and script are fragments deriving from two originally different codices, one a lectionary with lections mostly from the New Testament (Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke; Pauline and Catholic Epistles), and the other about one-half of a manuscript containing the Gospel of John (see Ch. 3 § 3.11). From the remnants of these two parchment codices, both badly damaged by the fire that led to the detection of the New Finds in 1975, it is obvious that the Albanian manuscript tradition shared most of its characteristics (quire structure, page layout, text structure) with Armenian and Georgian codices of the sixth to ninth centuries; as the palimpsests are not dated otherwise, this is the only hint as to the time when the Albanian texts may have been written down.

References

Abulaže 1938; Aleksizė – Mahé 1997; Gippert et al. 2009; Šanize 1938.