

Achtung!

Dies ist eine Internet-Sonderausgabe des Kapitels
„Georgian Manuscripts“
von Jost Gippert (2014).
Sie sollte nicht zitiert werden. Zitate sind der Originalausgabe in
Comparative Oriental Manuscript Studies. An Introduction
Hamburg: COMSt 2015, 49–51
zu entnehmen.

Attention!

This is a special internet edition of the chapter
“Georgian Manuscripts”
by Jost Gippert (2014).
It should not be quoted as such. For quotations, please refer to the original edition in
Comparative Oriental Manuscript Studies. An Introduction
Hamburg: COMSt 2015, 49–51.

Alle Rechte vorbehalten / All rights reserved:

Jost Gippert, Frankfurt 2015

3.8. Georgian manuscripts (JG)

Although autochthonous historiography claims that writing was adopted by the Georgians as early as the third century BCE, there is no proof so far that their language was given written form before the conversion to Christianity in the fourth–fifth centuries CE, all written documents of older times being either Greek or Aramaic (or in both languages side by side, as in the famous bilingual inscription of Armazi of the first century CE; Çereteli 1941; Gippert – Tandaschwili 1999). The oldest extant sources written in Georgian are stone inscriptions of the fifth century discovered in the Monastery of the Cross near Jerusalem (inscription of c.452; Çereteli 1960; Gippert – Tandaschwili 2002) and in the cathedral of Bolnisi in Lower Kartli (South-East Georgia; inscription of around 493; Musxelišvili 1938, 325–343; Gippert – Tandaschwili 1999–2002; Gippert 2014a); the script used is the fully developed Old Georgian majuscule named *mrglovani*, ‘round [script]’, which was also the sole script used in the first centuries of the Georgian manuscript tradition up to about the ninth century. A minuscule variant derived from it, named *nusxuri* ‘manuscript [script]’ or *nusxa-xucuri* ‘ecclesiastical [script] of manuscripts’, appeared by about the same time, with majuscules continuing to be used as initials, in titles, and the like (*asomtavruli*, lit. ‘capital letter[s]’). The combination of *nusxuri* and *asomtavruli* remained in use in religious writings up to the nineteenth century, whereas in secular contexts (but also in colophons), a cursive variant of the minuscule has been used since about the tenth century; this latter script, named *mxedruli* ‘knights’ [script]’, is the one still in use today. With but few exceptions, the Georgian scripts were used only for the Georgian language in manuscripts. Exceptions are, among others, Greek *incipits* of hymns transcribed into Georgian (Gippert 2014b), sporadic cases of a sister language of Georgian, Svan, appearing in secondary notes of a mediaeval Gospel manuscript (Gippert 2013, 101–102), or a seventeenth century Turkish Bible written in *mxedruli* (hitherto unpublished, but see Luffin 2014).

The Georgian manuscript tradition, which developed continuously for about 1,500 years since the invention of the Georgian script and which is attested by about 75,000 manuscript leaves that survive until the present day, has proven to be extremely valuable as a witness of both Christian religious thought and Near Eastern narrative skill; it has preserved a noteworthy amount of early versions of the Gospels and hagiographical, homiletic, and hymnographic texts, mostly translated from Greek. In spite of their importance, Georgian manuscripts have remained under-studied in many respects, especially concerning their history, structure, and composition. Many of the observations assembled in the present handbook must therefore be regarded as preliminary.

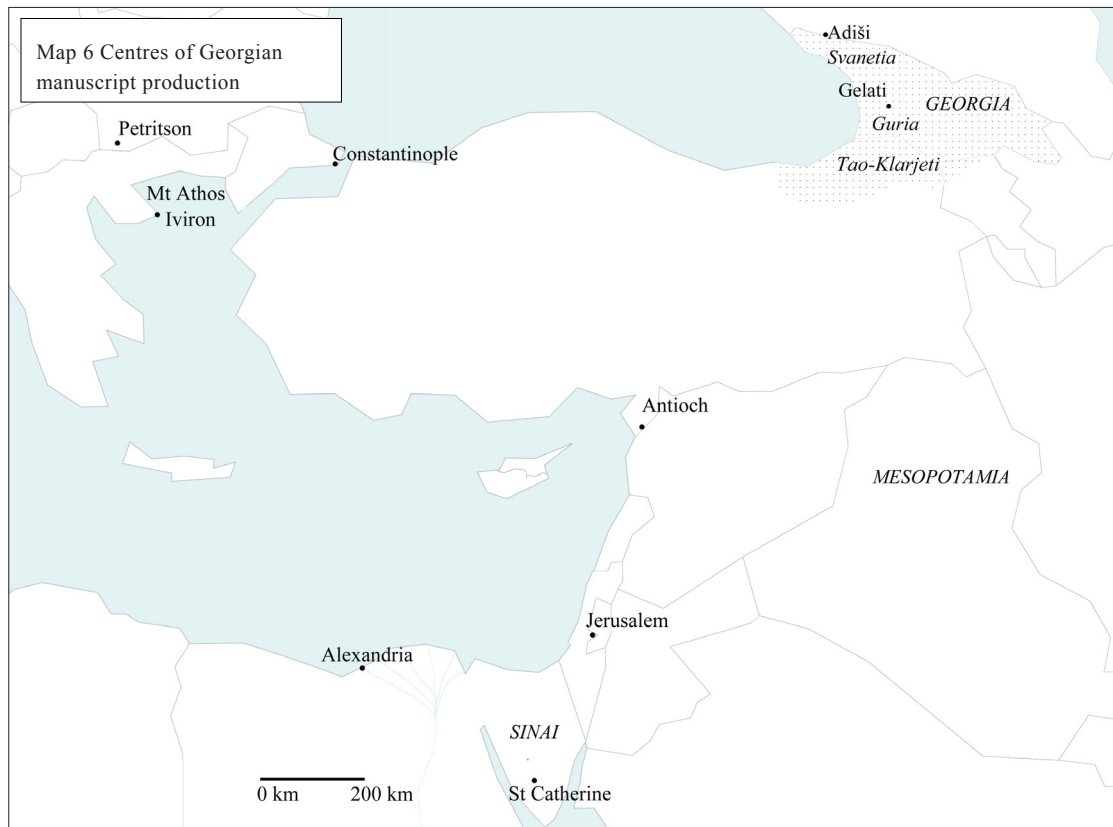
The oldest dated Georgian manuscript known so far is the manuscript 32-57-33+N89 of the Georgian collection of St Catherine’s Monastery on Mount Sinai, a multiple-text parchment codex (*mravaltavi* ‘multi-headed’; Gippert forthcoming) in *mrglovani* script written in St Sabas’ Laura near Jerusalem in

863/864 (Šaniže 1959). However, there are clear indications of greater age in many other Georgian manuscripts. This is especially true of the so-called *xanmeṭi* and *haemeṭi* periods covering approximately the fifth to eighth centuries, which are characterized by the occurrence of special verbal and nominal affixes consisting of the letters *x* (*kh*) and *h*. Nearly all manuscripts exhibiting these traits have come down to us only in palimpsest form; an exception is the famous ‘Sinai Lectionary’, which represents an intermediate stage with both *xanmeṭi* and *haemeṭi* forms occurring side by side (Šaniže 1944; Imnaišvili 2004, 47–69; Gippert et al. 2007b; Gippert et al. 2007a, xxvi n. 89; see below). Another guide to the (relative) chronology of undated Old Georgian manuscripts is palaeography (Gippert et al. 2007a, xxvi; see Ch. 2 § 6).

Nearly all manuscript codices that have come down to us from the Old Georgian period (up to the thirteenth century) have religious contents, which implies that they were written by clergymen, in churches or monasteries, either in what may be styled the Georgian homeland (south of the Caucasus) or elsewhere in the Christian Near East. The most crucial role in the early centuries was played by Jerusalem, where Georgian monks had settled as early as the fifth century; the Monastery of the Cross, erected there by Georgians in the eleventh century, was dissolved only at the end of the nineteenth century when its library was taken over by the Greek patriarchate. Other centres of the production of Georgian manuscripts abroad were St Catherine’s Monastery on Mount Sinai, where Georgians worked continuously between about the ninth and the fourteenth centuries, and the monastery of Iviron (‘Iberians’, i.e. Georgians’ [monastery]) on Mount Athos, which was founded by Georgians in the tenth century. Among the ‘autochthonous’ centres of Georgian manuscript production, the most outstanding were the provinces of Ṭao-Ḳlarṣeti and Šavṣeti in eastern Anatolia, both now belonging to Turkey. There are clear indications that all these centres kept close contacts with each other throughout the Middle Ages.

Manuscript codices with non-religious content came into being by the beginning of the thirteenth century, one of the oldest specimens being a paper codex containing, among other things, the Georgian translation of an Arabic astrological treatise (Ḳaranāze et al. 2010, 39). The same century witnessed the Georgians’ endeavour to participate in the philosophical dispute about the neo-Platonism of the time, with the schools of Gelati (in West Georgia) and Iqalto (in East Georgia) producing relevant manuscript books. While all these books were still written in ecclesiastical *nusxuri*, the secular *mxedruli* was used in codices containing the products of both original and translated poetry and prose literature, among them Shota Rustaveli’s epic *Vepxistqaosani* (‘The One [knight] in the Panther’s Skin’), the Georgian adaptation of Gurgānī’s Persian romance of *Vīs u Rāmīn* (*Visramiani*), and other specimens of courtly literature. Different from the religious (Christian) tradition that visibly linked the Old Georgian production of manuscripts to the Byzantine world, the secular tradition was strongly influenced by Islamic or, more precisely, Persian models, a fact that is evident not only from the textual contents, but also from the layout of the manuscripts, the illustrations they contain, and other features (Gippert – Tandaschwili 2014, 11–12). With the introduction of printing in the middle of the eighteenth century, the production of manuscript books in Georgia started to decrease gradually, and it reached its end during the second half of the nineteenth century.

Only in rare cases have Georgian manuscript books been preserved where they were originally written. This is true, for example, of the major part of the Georgian manuscript collection of St Catherine’s Monastery on Mount Sinai, which comprises around 250 catalogued codices (the actual number is considerably smaller due to losses and due to the fact that several items of the so-called New Finds of 1975 actually belong, as fragments, to codices registered earlier). Other collections that have remained in their original locations are those of the Iviron Monastery on Mount Athos (c.85 items) and of the Monastery of the Holy Cross in Jerusalem (c.160 items, now kept in the Greek patriarchate). On the other hand, most of the manuscripts that were produced in Georgia and eastern Anatolia have been assembled in four collections now hosted in the National Centre of Manuscripts in Tbilisi (‘A’: the collection of the former Ecclesiastical Museum; ‘H’: the collection of the former Museum of the Georgian Society for History and Ethnography; ‘Q’: the collection of the State Museum of Georgia; ‘S’: the collection of the former Society for the Promotion of Literacy among the Georgian Population; altogether c.9,000 codices; <<http://www.manuscript.ge/index.php?m=73&ln=eng>>, last access 2014). Minor collections within Georgia are those of the Historico-ethnographical Museum in Kutaisi (c.700 items), the Museum of Axalcixe (c.75 items), the Historico-ethnographical Museum in Gori, and the Historico-ethnographical Museum in Mestia. Three mediaeval manuscript codices (two evangeliaries, one lectionary) are known to have remained in the possession of mountain villages in the highlands of Svanetia (Kurashi, Lakhamula, Lakhushdi), where they are kept in the village churches (Gippert 2013).



Apart from the ‘authentic’ repositories, Georgian manuscripts are found throughout the world, in consequence of their removal mostly from Jerusalem and Mount Sinai. Noteworthy collections are hosted in Graz, Austria, Universitätsbibliothek (including the ‘Sinai Lectionary’ of about the seventh or eighth century, mentioned already above, MS 2058/1); Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek (including one of the most remarkable palimpsest codices originating from Jerusalem, Cod.Vind.georg. 2; Gippert et al. 2007a); Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France; Leipzig, Universitätsbibliothek; Oxford, Bodleian Library; Birmingham, England, Cadbury Research Library, the Mingana Collection; Washington, DC, the Library of Dumbarton Oaks; and St Petersburg, Biblioteka Instituta Vostokovedenija Rossijskoj Akademii Nauk. Fragments of Georgian manuscripts that were reused as flyleaves or the like in non-Georgian codices are found, for example, in the Matenadaran in Yerevan, Armenia (Gippert – Outtier 2009), in the library of the Armenian monastery in New Julfa near Isfāhān, Iran (Outtier 2013) and in the Armenian patriarchate in Jerusalem (Outtier 1986).

References

Çereteli 1941, 1960; Gippert 2013, 2014a, 2014b, forthcoming; Gippert et al. 2007a; Gippert – Outtier 2009; Imnaišvili 2004; Karanaze et al. 2010; Luffin 2014; Musxelišvili 1938; Outtier 1986, 2013; Šanize 1944, 1959; Web sources: Gippert et al. 2007b; Gippert – Tandaschwili 1999–2002, 2014; Tbilisi, National Centre of Manuscripts, <<http://www.manuscript.ge/index.php?m=73&ln=eng>>, last access 29 November 2014.