

Achtung!

Dies ist eine Internet-Sonderausgabe des Aufsatzes

„Preface“

von Jost Gippert (2021).

Sie sollte nicht zitiert werden. Zitate sind der Originalausgabe in Chitunashvili, Dali et al. (eds.), *The Caucasus between East and West. Historical and Philological Studies in Honour of Zaza Aleksidze* / კავკასია აღმოსავლეთსა და დასავლეთს შორის. ისტორიულ-ფილოლოგიური ძიებანი მიძღვნა ზაზა ალექსიძის დაბადების 85 წლისტავისადმი, 2, 11–13 zu entnehmen.

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Jost Gippert, Frankfurt 2022

PREFACE

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*There is nothing secret that will not be revealed,
and nothing hidden that will not be recognised.*

Nothing can describe the motives, the goals and the scholarly intention of Zaza Aleksidze better than this quotation from the Gospels (Matthew 5.18). His scientific oeuvre, consisting of nearly 200 publications until now, bears witness to this allover, and the very fact that we do know the words of the Evangelist in the language of the Caucasian “Albanians” today is owed to his efforts: with the identification of the only manuscript remnants of the East Caucasian language, concealed under a Georgian overtext in two palimpsest codices of St Catherine’s Monastery on Mt Sinai, and the decipherment of the peculiar script used to write it, it was Zaza Aleksidze who paved the way for a thorough investigation of the “Albanian” heritage, which manifested itself in an extensive edition of the manuscript remains twelve years ago – the two volumes (no. 132 in his list of publications) comprise about one half of the Gospel of John and an extensive lectionary with pericopes from the other Gospels, Acts, the Pauline and Catholic Epistles, and the prophet Isaiah. And indeed, this goal was anything but easily achieved: it required not only several travels to the monastery and the employment of a sophisticated photographic equipment but also, over more than a decade, a close cooperation in a team of which I am happy to have been a member. The images added below may give an impression of the common work we undertook on Mt Sinai in October, 2004.

However, it is not only the “Albanian” heritage that has been in the focus of Zaza Aleksidze’s scholarly work on Mt Sinai. Leaving aside the great catalogue of the Georgian manuscripts among the so-called “New Finds” of St Catherine’s Monastery, which Zaza Aleksidze compiled together with Mzekala Shanidze, Lili Khevsuriani and Michael Kavtaria (no. 112 in the list, of 2005 – we all deeply regret that the latter two colleagues have not lived to see Zaza’s 85th birthday celebrated), we may mention here his discovery of two new witnesses to the Conversion of Kartli and the Life of St Nino, mss. Sin. geo. N 48 and 50, and we are extremely grateful for the facsimile edition of the latter one which Zaza Aleksidze published together with Jean-Pierre Mahé in 2001 (no. 92 in the list), thus making this important manuscript accessible to the scholarly world, and for the publication of the texts he delivered in 2007 (no. 119). The same is true for his edition of the Sinaitic version of the Acts of the Syrian Fathers, which has appeared only recently (no. 187, 2019).

Beyond the “New Finds” of Mt Sinai and their extraordinary impact on the early centuries of Christian literacy in the Caucasus, Zaza Aleksidze has rendered outstanding services to a field that certainly deserves more attention than it has received since Soviet times, namely, the interrelation between Georgia and Armenia and their respective churches. His editions of the “Book of Letters” (no. 5, of 1968), of Ukhtanes’s “History of the Severance of the Georgians from the Armenians” (no. 17, of 1975), of Arseni Sapareli’s treatise “On the Separation of Kartli and Armenia” (no. 33, of 1980), but also his study on the inscriptions of the Sioni of At’eni (nos. 24, 1978, 37, 1983, and 53, 1989) are indispensable for this intriguing aspect of Caucasian history, which Zaza Aleksidze himself summarised in his book on the Theological controversies in the Caucasus of the 6th century (no. 164, of 2015).

It is clear that this immense oeuvre presupposes an extraordinary mastery of languages and philological methods. In the case of Zaza Aleksidze, this comprises not only Armenian and Caucasian “Albanian” (as well as Russian, French, and English used in publications), but also Syriac (cf. no. 9 in the list, 1971), Persian (cf. nos. 79, 2000, and 96, 2002, and especially the edition of Manuscripts and Historical Documents in the Institute of Manuscripts of Georgia published in Persian in 2001, no. 90), and Hebrew (manifest in the facsimile edition of the Bible of Lailashi, no. 135, of 2009). And of course we should not overlook his outstanding contributions to the history of his own language, Georgian, for which it may suffice to mention his album of dated Georgian Manuscripts covering the time span of the 9th to 16th centuries (no. 167, 2014). Celebrating his 85th anniversary, we all hope that he will still have many years to continue his invaluable efforts!

Like perhaps no other scholar of today, Zaza Aleksidze covers a field of research which can best be named by the title that was chosen for the three-volume collection of his articles (nos. 140, 2010; 145, 2011; 178, 2016): “Caucasus Christianus”. Another quotation from the “Albanian” palimpsests may be taken to express what we feel looking at Zaza’s oeuvre; in the Second Letter to the Corinthians (9.15), we here read:

ო-ჩ-ყ-ჯ-ზ-ჩ-ყ-ს-გ-ო-ს-გ-ჩ-ჯ-ს-გ-ო-ჩ-ს-ო-ო-ო-ო-ო-ო-

His gifts cannot be spoken of.

Jost Gippert



Fig. 1: At work in St Catherine's Monastery on Mt Sinai, October 2004: Jean-Pierre Mahé, Giorgi Aleksidze, Zaza Aleksidze, Jost Gippert; Photo: Manana Tandashvili



Fig. 2: After work in St Catherine's Monastery on Mt Sinai, October 2004: Manana Tandashvili, Jean-Pierre Mahé, Zaza Aleksidze, Jost Gippert; photo: Giorgi Aleksidze