

Essential Textual and Editorial Markers of the Editions of the Bible's Georgian Translations in the Pre-Soviet, Soviet and Post-Soviet Eras

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Abstract

The paper studies the editing history of the Bible's Georgian translations (BGTs), covering the pre-Soviet, Soviet and post-Soviet eras. The main goal of the article is to identify the essential textual and editorial markers of the editions carried out in these three different epochs. Actuality of the research is conditioned by the fact that in Georgian reality (and not only), the field of the Editorial Studies is still considered as an applied part of the Textual Scholarship, associated with publishing and the scientific boundaries between these two disciplines are not clearly delineated yet, despite the fact that the Georgian editors have always conducted editorial work alongside with the textual one since the early middle ages. This is especially obvious in the example of the editions of the BGTs, which appeared in the early years of Christianity (5th-6th cc.) and occupy one of the honourable places on the world cultural map alongside the Latin, Coptic, Gothic, Armenian, Arabic, and Aramaic translations. The Georgian textual criticism and editorial studies developed within the practice of: a) producing manuscripts of the BGTs (before invention of the printing press), b) editing them (in the print era) and c) making electronic editions (in the digital era). In the article, I do not deal with the issue of producing manuscripts, but only with the history of printed editions and with a few electronic editions. The research has shown that, despite ideological pressure in the Soviet era, thanks to the Georgian scientists, the editions of the BGTs spiritually and intellectually fed the Georgian national being and strengthened its national identity.

Key words: *Bible's Georgian Translations, Pre-Soviet Era, Soviet Era, Post-Soviet Era, Scholarly Edition*

Introduction

Georgian translations of the Bible have a nearly 15-century history, which, at the same time, is the history of Georgian writing itself. They start from the 5th-6th cc. palimpsest manuscripts and end with the 18th-century copies

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of handwritten books. Khanmeti fragments testify that translation of certain books of the Old Testament should have started at the beginning of the Georgian writing. According to Korneli Kekelidze (1980: 411-412), the Book of Psalms and the Gospel should have been translated the earliest. The translation of the Gospel should have been done in the 5th century, if not earlier. The English Kartvelologist David Leng (1961) expressed a similar opinion. The original literary-historical sources support this assumption: *Martyrdom of Shushanik* and the metaphrastic edition of *The Life of Shio and Evagre*.

Nearly 300 copies of Georgian translations of the Four Gospels have reached until today. About forty Codices preserve texts of the oldest version of the Gospel, which is especially important for restoring the Greek archetype. The four Gospels were created in the various historical or religious situations, in different spatial area, cultural centres or scriptoriums existing in Georgia or abroad by people possessing different knowledge, religious ideals and literary taste.

As in Europe, in Georgian churches of the medieval period, when the dominant media was manuscript tradition, the textual and editorial work was carried out by one person. A serious number of well-known Georgian editors worked in those centres, fulfilling a huge role in developing the Georgian textual and editorial fields. We can name Giorgi and Ekvtime Mtatsmindeli, Ephrem Mtsire and others. They deserve credit for the versions of the BGTs belonging today to the Golden Fund of Georgian cultural heritage.

Method

I studied all editions of the BGTs available in Georgia or abroad since 1705 until today. I observed the textual and editorial works presented in each edition, compared them with each other and singled out those editions which show remarkable textual and editorial practices.

Discussion

The main textual and editorial markers of the editions of the BGTs in the Pre-Soviet Era

Studies of Georgian versions of the Bible have a long history in Georgia and abroad. In Georgian reality, scientific grounds for Bible's textual criticism are already given in the testament of the 11th-century religious

figure, brilliant translator and editor, Giorgi Mtatsmindeli, enclosed to the text translated by him. From there, we find out that he conducted fundamental textual research: investigated various copies of the Greek text and compared the psalms' Georgian translations to them. Editions done by him, Ekvtime Mtatsmindeli and others prove their high professionalism and editorial preparation.

The Georgian writer, lexicographer, scientist and political figure Sulkhani-Saba Orbeliani (1658-1725) is considered the initiator of preparation of the Old Testament's first critical text. His notes on Biblical versions, alignment, laying the text out, corrections based on comparing various copies to each other constitute the critical apparatus that the textual scholars use today.

The necessity of textual research of the BGTs was set as an urgent issue in the 19th century by the famous historian, Dimitri Bakradze. In the article *Three old variants of the Georgian Gospel*, published in the journal "Iveria", we read:

It is highly desirable all such kinds of manuscripts to be spread among Georgian monasteries and families, to be collected in Tbilisi, carefully compared with each other and the remarkable variants to be printed as one book (1883: #5-6).

This is nothing less than what we call a critical edition in modern textual scholarship. In the work *The old variants of the Georgian Four Gospels*, he, for the first time, considered the clarification of interrelations between Georgian translations and foreign versions (Greek, Armenian, and Syrian) as one of the most important research tasks.

Thus, philological research on the Gospel texts dates back to the 19th century, though until the 1940s, it lacks scientific depth. According to academician Akaki Shanidze (1945), the reason is the fact that the Georgian texts were not critically established and edited, and the history of foreign texts was not foreseen. Because of this, the problem was being solved not on the base of investigating the whole text thoroughly and discussing it critically, but with the help of comparing certain places in the text.

The history of editing BGTs starts in Russia, where King Archil, after his exile, started to take care of editing Georgian translation of Biblical texts thoroughly, and printed *The book of David's psalms* in the national printing house of Moscow in 1705. In 1709, in Georgia, it was printed under the name *Bible: the book of prophets and the Gospel* in the Georgian printing house established by King Vakhtang VI. Thus, the practice of editing

biblical texts takes its ground from printing products containing texts of both the Old and New Testament.

The edition of 1709 relied on Giorgi Mtatsmindeli's wording, and served ecclesiastical goals. Since then, the Gospel was edited several times in Tbilisi, as well as in Moscow and Petersburg. We can name the editions of 1779, 1876, 1879, 1883, 1895, 1896, 1898, 1900, 1904, 1909, etc. It was printed as separate chapters, as well as in the whole and together with the texts of the New Testament.

We have samples of the phototypographic edition too. In this format, for example, in 1817, *The Gospel according to Matthew* was edited; in 1883 – *The Gospel according to John*, *The Gospel according to Matthew* and *The Gospel according to Luke*; in 1895 – *The Gospel according to Mark*; in 1900 – *The Gospel according to Luke*, etc.

All these editions, like the Gospel printed for the first time, were of ecclesiastical importance, and neither of them was scientific, which means that the printed texts are not reliable and authentic. Lack of textual investigation naturally implies lack of editorial research: neither an introduction, nor prefaces, literary essays, research, scientific apparatus was enclosed to these editions. Even the contents page was either absent or did not correspond with the title given in the title-page of the book. In certain cases, there was no year of editing indicated. Exactly such one is endowed with an explanatory dictionary, which does not have a printed form, looks like a manuscript, and is written in black Indian ink. There are no appropriate examples testified from the text. This is one of the early samples of the dictionary enclosed to the texts of the New Testament.

As Akaki Shanidze (1945) remarks in his first scholarly edition of the Four Gospels, in the second half of the 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th century, there were attempts to prepare scholarly editions of the Four Gospels, but no serious steps were taken. Only in 1908, the Russian Academy of Science started the practical implementation of this work and, in 1909, printed the chapter of Matthew and in 1911 – the chapter of Mark. The edition of 1909 is the first to include a short preface (by Vladimir Beneshevich in Georgian and Russian languages, in Mkhedruli script and presented into two columns), explaining which version the edition is based on and with which manuscripts it is compared. Consequently, the variant readings are presented in scholium. This indicates to textual investigation conducted by the editor, accompanied by editorial research fulfilled by him to some extent, namely: the variant readings are marked with appropriate letters, which is the first case in the edition practice of the Georgian Four

Gospels; the elucidations of abbreviations and symbols (inserting, omitting, etc.), used in the edition, are included. This publication is regarded as the first scientific edition of Georgian translations of the New Testament.

Beneshevich's edition had defective sides, of course. As Georgian scientist, Ivane Imnaishvili evaluates, "many mistakes were made, one could not find out where the first edition began from and where the second one finished" (1979: 5). However, the researcher considers this publication a scientific edition.

As for the Georgian translations of the Old Testament, a scientific approach is primarily noticed in the edition of A. Tsagareli (1886) – *Song of Solomon*, based on the Athos (Oshki) manuscript. The variant readings are given in the scholium from the Georgian as well as Slavic, Greek and Armenian manuscripts, labelled with letters.

After that, publications continued along the same unscientific lines of the previous editions. Indeed, there are editions containing separate scientific details, but this does not change the final picture. For example, in the edition of 1912, the chapters of Biblical books with the indications to sections, supposedly, where the texts find their analogues, are given in the footnote. In the end, it includes the rubric "principal mistakes."

The Gospel according to Matthew, printed in Georgia in 1914, is accompanied by a two-page introduction which presumably should be the first case in its editing practice. The edition of 1915 has a two-sheet preface. The Archaeological Society in Moscow in 1916 prepared the phototypographic edition of the oldest dated Georgian text of Four Gospels (Adishi, 897) with Ekvtime Takaishvili's preface.

Editorial work based on comparing Georgian texts to Slavic versions took place in the Georgian colony of Moscow. The result of this endeavour was *The Bible* printed by Bakar – the son of The King Vakhtang VI, in 1743.

In 1920, Korneli Kekelidze edited *The Ecclesiastes* according to four editions: the Athos version, the variant of Mtskheta, Moscow edition and Petritsonic edition. Each page presents two editions in two columns without footnotes.

Thus, in the pre-Soviet era, the editions are mainly characterized by an unscientific nature. In few cases, one can see scientific signs, but they are not systematic and complete. During that period, the standards of scholarly editing had not been established yet.

The main textual and editorial markers of the editions of the BGTs in the Soviet Era

The scholarly editions of the BGTs start in the Soviet era. In 1926 and 1929, American Kartvelologist, Professor of Harvard University, R. Blake published *The Book of Ezra Sutieli*, based on Jerusalem and Oshki manuscripts.

R. Blake printed Mark's chapter with variants from the manuscripts of Opiza and Tbeti and with Latin translation typographically in Paris, in 1928, based on the edition of the Russian Academy of Science. In 1933, he edited *The Gospel according to Matthew*. Later, in 1950, in collaboration with the French scientist, M. Brier - *The Gospel according to John*. After Blake's death, Brier did not stop this activity, and in 1955 edited the text of Luke from the Adishi Gospel.

In 1944, Akaki Shanidze published the phototypographical edition of *Khanmeti Lectionary*, the second unique and brilliant monument after the Adishi Gospel, as the scientist remarks. The edition contains prefaces in Russian and English. A symphony dictionary is also enclosed. Akaki Shanidze prepared the first scholarly edition of the Georgian Gospel as soon as World War II ended in 1945. In the preface, the researcher considers the fact of not having the critically established text of the Gospel an unfortunate reality. He outlines the first-rate objective of the Georgian philological science preparation of the editions of the Georgian Gospels separately, as monographs. The scientist formulates postulates of what should have been done with textual research of the Gospel:

In the process of investigation of such issues, we should first consider what the Georgian text itself is, what kind of interrelations the variants of old manuscripts reveal, what editions we have got, etc. Only after fulfilling such preliminary tasks, historical-literary issues can be relevantly set up and solved appropriately (1945: 10).

The manuscripts presented in this edition are compared with other versions and appropriate analysis is presented. Codicological characterization of the manuscripts is also given. The text is printed in two columns, but, unlike many previous editions of the Bible, here different wordings are given in different columns and not one text in two columns. Practically, in previous editions, in most cases, the texts were not printed according to several versions. The footnotes contain variant readings of editions. The artistic decoration of manuscripts, front cover, testaments of

the translators and ascriptions on the margins are characterized. There is a detailed explanation about conditional signs and rules of using the text. The scientist explains several issues (including linguistic ones) and the principles that he used while establishing certain places of the text and what his attitude towards the text is, for example, how orthographical and other questions are solved in the edition, what is prioritized, when and what is taken into consideration, etc.

In the Soviet era, editing the Bible books encountered some obstacles due to the Soviet regime. In most cases, they were published with the hidden titles such as, for example, *Oshki Manuscript*, *Mtskheturi manuscript*, *Khanmeti Lectionary*, etc. This way, attention was paid to the scientific character of the text and not to the religious one. It is also interesting that, according to the resolution of the social-scientific department of Georgian Soviet Academy of Science, the series of *Old Georgian language monuments* was founded and the main goal of this department was to research and edit the old monuments of the Georgian language. This series was an editorial policy of the Georgian philological science to protect editions from Soviet ideological pressure.

Ivane Imnaishvili scientifically issued *The Revelation of St. John and its Interpretation*, in 1961. The publication involves six photo tables, though of low quality. The edition also contains a dictionary and an investigation clarifying the origin and essence of the published text. We should remark that the researcher considers miracles and ecstasies as nonsense. He writes:

The era, which created ancient Christianity, represented in this book, was the time when miracles, ecstasies, visions, fortune-telling and other nonsenses had the leading roles. The atmosphere where the earlier Christianity originated was of this kind, moreover, it emerged among the people who acquired such fantasies about extra natural cases better than others did. (1961)

In order to consolidate his opinion, I. Imnaishvili verifies the references of Marx, Engels, and Lenin in the scholium of the first two pages of the investigation. However, from the scientific point of view, this edition meets the standards of a scholarly edition. Unfortunately, the scientists living in the Soviet period had to pay tribute to authority. This most likely can be said about other spheres of science than textual and editorial fields.

In spite of the examined example, similar cases cannot be found in other publications of the Bible edited in the Soviet period, when the established rule of scientific life was to analyse every scientific topic in the

light of Marxism-Leninism, in spite of the character of the work. Editing the Biblical texts was a kind of oasis where Georgian scientists could keep themselves away from pressure. In such rare cases as those mentioned, professional and honest researchers like I. Imnaishvili obeyed the Soviet ideology for the sake of the promotion of Georgian science. Their contribution to its development is great.

In the respective publication, the editor abided by the general principles of scholarly edition defined by Ak. Shanidze, according to which every possible form should be kept in the text and only impossible forms and vivid errors should be corrected.

In 1979, Ivane Imnaishvili edited *Two final editions of Georgian Four Gospels* with a full scientific apparatus. Since 1981, the Committee for Georgian historical sources existing within the Georgian Academy of Science started editing the books of the so-called *Mtskheturi Manuscript*, containing the texts of both Old and New Testament.

In 1989, *The Book of the Old Testament, part I, Genesis and Exodus* was critically edited. Researchers of this edition outline the general textual features of the publication: grouping manuscripts according to textual similarities, detecting relations among the groups, setting up and establishing the whole text, finding out the relationship of Georgian translations to the foreign (mainly towards Greek and Armenian) sources, clarifying time and extensional limits, nature of corrections, etc. Besides, the editors define some issues connected with the investigation of the Georgian versions of the Old Testament, indicating to requirements of scholarly editing in Georgia at this time. The publication is proof of the hard work conducted by Georgian scholar-editors.

Numerous books of the Old and New Testament were edited in this period. They were mainly prepared under Akaki Shanidze's editorship, who, in fact, defined the standards and editorial conception of scholarly edition in Georgia.

The main textual and editorial markers of the editions of the BGTs in the Post-Soviet Era

The scholarly editing of the BGTs continued in the Post-Soviet era. It was developed and refined, acquiring new scientific features. Once the Soviet ideological pressure disappeared, the way to the West, where the era of digital humanities had started long ago, opened. At the end of the 1990s, in the collaboration with Frankfurt Goethe-Institute, a group of Georgian and

foreign scientists, under the leadership of Zurab Sarjveladze and Jost Gippert, started to edit the BGTs in digital format (<http://armazi.uni-frankfurt.de/framee.htm>), though a lot of work is still to be done and electronic scholarly editing in Georgia is yet to be developed. This is a challenge the modern editorial field is facing today and it should be overcome in cooperation with foreign researchers again.

In 2010, scientist Elgudja Giunashvili prepared the printed edition of the *Four Gospels according to Sinai Manuscript* (978-979 years). The investigation of the Sinai wording of Georgian Gospel was initiated by the text-establishing scientific group set up by Zurab Sarjveladze in the 1990s. This text in the mentioned edition is published with a documentary dictionary and indexes. While establishing the critical text of Sinai wording, the scientific group was guided by the principle of “editing one edition”, meaning that the manuscripts’ data is preserved intact (lapses, of course, are corrected). For example, if any form is given with different variants in different places of the text and each variant is admissible providing the language history, each of them is kept in its place (e.g. ცხორება / ცხრება (life)).

The edition attracts our attention with its editorial novelty; namely, it is endowed with indexes of textual peculiarities of the Sinai Four Gospels, containing the following units: additions, reductions, changes of word meaning or word order in a sentence, concurrent paradigms with other versions of the Four Gospels in the copies of the Sinai wording, followed by the indexes of anthroponyms, toponyms, numbers and measuring units, money, time, age (each verified by appropriate examples, indicating to the page and text line). In the end, an extensive dictionary is enclosed (verified by examples).

In 2010, Manana Machkhaneli edited *Anbandidi*, the 9th-century manuscript of the Four Gospels under Darejan Tvaltadze’s editorship, who emphasizes “an ambitious goal”: to restore the part of Georgians’ intellectual history and let others and ourselves know about how the Georgian scholars, brilliant translators or copyist-editors brought up today what Jesus said and taught us.

One of the editorial dignities of *Anbandidi* can be considered the fact that the editor, under the title “What do we know”, has given the information about what we know today about the interrelation of manuscripts containing the Georgian Four Gospels, what are the general results of textual research on Georgian Gospel.

Here, as well as in the edition of E. Giunaishvili, is the table of *Anbandidi* concurrent paradigms on the example of the Gospel according to

Luke and Matthew. The editorial strategy of the previous edition is also maintained. The editor remarks: "We deliberately have not restored the normative-grammatical forms in order not to lose the style of the scribe's spoken language and maintain a unique form of the manuscript". On pages 97-289, photocopies of manuscripts are given. A two-page English translation is also included. In the end, the list of Gospel's scholarly editions is also provided.

The editing of the Old Testament's Georgian translations, prepared in Korneli Kekelidze Georgian National Center of Manuscripts, was concluded in 2017, with two fundamental volumes, containing more than 4000 pages in total, summarizing the 30-year findings of textual researches on the BGTs. The edition is significant as far as the textual and editorial works are differentiated here: it is indicated who is the establisher of the critical text and who prepared it for editing.

Conclusions

Thus, the editing history of the BGTs starts in the pre-Soviet era. The editions of this time served the religious goals and did not have any ambition to scientific character, though separate editions had scientific signs, for example, pointing to variant readings and placing them in scholium, also presenting conditional signs and their explanations.

The first scientific edition of the Georgian translations of the Four Gospels dates back to the early 1910s (by V. Beneshevich (1909-1911)), and of the Old Testament books - to the end of the 19th century (by Al. Tsagareli (1886)).

As for the scholarly editions of the Gospel, the first one was fulfilled in 1945 by Akaki Shanidze, who drew the main textual and editorial vectors for scholarly editing and under whose editorship numerous books of the Old and New Testament were edited - studying the textual interrelations between the manuscripts, separating wordings and their copies, identifying the relations of the translations to the Armenian, Greek, and other sources, clarifying the origin of manuscripts and other important issues. This scientific character of the scholarly editing was kept in the course of time, although it was promoted and completed by succeeding researchers. They added, for example, concurrent paradigms, investigating the separate copies for their editorial completeness, identifying the main characters of corrections, clarifying the relative chronology of translations

reached up today, revealing the connections of readings preserved in the lectionaries of Biblical copies, etc.

In the Soviet era, due to the ideological pressure, the titles of the editions of the BGTs systematically contained such concepts as “manuscript”, “wording”, in order to emphasize the scientific task of the editions and not the religious nature. In spite of the Soviet regime, the Georgian scientists managed to edit Biblical books and bring them to the readers. Though they seldom had to pay tribute to the Soviet censorship, this did not damage the textual and editorial level of editions. Editing the Biblical texts seemed to be the most stable and sustainable field freed from Soviet ideological pressure. The BGTs in the Soviet era were among the few fields where the scientific issues were not discussed in the light of Soviet ideology and with reference to the Soviet leaders. Only after the Soviet era, in 2017, the scholarly edition of the Old Testament was titled “Bible”. In this period, established collaborative relations with the West created appropriate conditions for establishing the new (digital) format of editing, which requires further development and strengthening.

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