

The Bilingual Scientific Online Journal of the **Academy for Digital Humanities**

დიგიტალური ჰუმანიტარიის აკადემია – საქართველოს  
ორენოვანი საერთაშორისო სამეცნიერო ონლაინჟურნალი

## დიგიტალური ქართველოლოგია



## Digital Kartvelology

Volume 4

Dedicated to the 100th Birthday of Mzekala Shanidze (16.1.2026)  
ეძღვნება მზექალა შანიძის დაბადების 100 წლისთავს (16.1.2026)

Tbilisi / თბილისი

2025

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ISSN: 2720-8427 (online)

# Digital Kartvelology, Vol. 4, 2025

დიგიტალური ქართველოლოგია, ტომი 4, 2025

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# Armeno-Georgian Connections through the Lens of Palimpsested Manuscripts

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**Abstract:** The literary heritage of the first millennium produced by Armenians and Georgians offers clear evidence of interactions between two nations that developed in constant contact with one another. While research on Armeno-Georgian palimpsests is still ongoing, current available data show that there are more Georgian manuscripts with Armenian lower texts than contrariwise. The chronological distribution of these palimpsests suggests that Armenians reused Georgian manuscripts only in modern times (16<sup>th</sup>/17<sup>th</sup> centuries), while Georgian palimpsesting of Armenian manuscripts took place already from the 9<sup>th</sup> century through the 14<sup>th</sup> century. In order to answer key questions such as the whereabouts, motivations, and circumstances of palimpsesting of Armenian or Georgian manuscripts, further research based on <sup>14</sup>C analysis in combination with parchment and ink analysis will be necessary to ascertain both the chronology and the geographical origin of the lower layers of the manuscripts under examination.

**Keywords:** Armenian manuscripts, Georgian manuscripts, palimpsests; Graz, Sinai, Tbilisi, Yerevan; <sup>14</sup>C/Radiocarbon analysis

## 1. Introduction

The literary heritage of the first millennium produced by Armenians and Georgians offers clear evidence of interactions between two nations that developed in constant contact with one another, sometimes in imitation or derivation, sometimes in competition, sometimes in independent ways.<sup>1</sup> Material evidence too—and in particular archaeology—witnesses to the remarkable ways in which Armenians and Georgians imprinted the gradual particularism of their architecture and culture in their surrounding landscape.<sup>2</sup> While significant advances have been made in the fields of literary studies and archaeology, however less attention has been paid to sources that fall both within the realms of material and literary culture. Filling this gap, this article explores the reality of Armeno-Georgian relations by focusing solely on manuscripts evidence or, more specifically, on Armeno-Georgian palimpsests that contain either an Armenian lower layer and a Georgian overtext or, conversely, a Georgian lower layer and an Armenian upper text. The primary aim of the article is to provide an easily accessible survey of all known extant Armeno-Georgian palimpsests for the benefits of both philologists and cultural historians working on Armeno-Georgian relations. This material is of particular importance when considering that before the end of the first millennium only very few complete manuscripts are extant in both Armenian and Georgian written culture, while for the early centuries of the two respective literacies all we are left with is parchment fragments, many of which are palimpsested.

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<sup>1</sup> The problem of the complexity of Armeno-Georgian literary and historical relations, including the invention of the national alphabets for the Armenians, the Georgians, and the Albanians is already present in the earliest original Armenian writing, i.e. Koriwn's *Life of Maštoc*, written as early as the 440s. For Koriwn's text and its context, see Terian (2023).

<sup>2</sup> See, for instance, at least Tchekhanovets (2018).

The list of palimpsested manuscripts discussed in this article has been compiled over the years and already published in a series of posters dedicated to Armenian and Georgian palimpsests prepared by Jost Gippert within the scope of the ERC project “DeLiCaTe”.<sup>3</sup> The article presents first Georgian manuscripts with an Armenian lower layer (2.1) and then Armenian manuscripts with a Georgian undertext (2.2). The inequality apparent in the more or less detailed information provided for each item discussed in this article reflects the current state of the art on this ensemble of items. Although it is not likely that the number of Armeno-Georgian manuscripts may sensibly alter in the future, nevertheless the findings presented in this article are to be taken as provisional, for in the field of manuscript studies—and especially of palimpsested manuscripts—new finds are more the norm than the exception.

## 2. The Extant Palimpsests

Lists of Armeno-Georgian palimpsests have been compiled over the years by Jost Gippert and are currently available online in a series of posters dedicated to manuscripts with either Armenian or Georgian lower layers.<sup>4</sup> Due to the fact that not every manuscript depository around the world has yet been fully described, it is possible that new items may be added to these lists. For the time being, the currently available data point at the existence of eight Georgian manuscripts with Armenian lower writing and three Armenian manuscripts with Georgian undertext. Being palimpsested, these manuscripts—or, at any rate, those folios actually palimpsested that belong to them—are, naturally, all in parchment. Table I gives a preliminary overview.

**Table I: Current list of Armeno-Georgian palimpsests**

<b>Manuscripts with Armenian Lower Layer and Georgian Upper Layer</b>			
Location	Institution	Shelfmark	Nr of Palimpsested Pages/Folios
Graz	Universitätsbibliothek	MS 2058/2	556 pp / 278 ff
Sinai	St Catherine’s Monastery	Sin. georg. NF 13	46 pp / 23 ff
Sinai	St Catherine’s Monastery	Sin. georg. NF 55	42 pp / 21 ff
Tbilisi	National Centre of Manuscripts	A-491	70 pp / 35 ff
Tbilisi	National Centre of Manuscripts	A-495	24 pp / 12 ff
Tbilisi	National Archives	1446/322	82 pp / 41 ff
Tbilisi	National Archives	1448/1976	4 pp? / 2 ff?
Tbilisi	National Archives	1446/5016	14 pp? / 7 ff?
<b>Manuscripts with Georgian Lower Layer and Armenian Upper Layer</b>			
Location	Institution	Shelfmark	Nr of Palimpsested Pages/Folios
Yerevan	Matenadaran	M 6141	109 pp / 55 ff
Yerevan	Matenadaran	M 6705	4 pp / 2 ff
Yerevan	Matenadaran	M 8624	334 pp / 167 ff

<sup>3</sup> On this project (PI: Jost Gippert) see <https://www.csmc.uni-hamburg.de/delicate/about/project.html>; for the posters see <https://www.csmc.uni-hamburg.de/delicate/materials/posters.html>. These and all other URLs quoted in this article were last accessed on 29 December, 2025.

<sup>4</sup> “Armenian Palimpsests”: <https://www.fdr.uni-hamburg.de/record/16949>; “Georgian Palimpsests of the Korneli Kekelidze Georgian National Centre of Manuscripts”: <https://www.fdr.uni-hamburg.de/record/16951>; “Georgian Palimpsests Outside of the Korneli Kekelidze Georgian National Centre of Manuscripts”: <https://www.fdr.uni-hamburg.de/record/16953>.



## 2.1 Armenian Palimpsested Manuscripts with Georgian Upper Layer

### 2.1.1 Graz, Universitätsbibliothek, MS 2058/2

The Universitätsbibliothek in Graz holds a small collection of Armenian and Georgian manuscripts that includes four codices, one scroll, three Georgian fragments, and one Armenian folio.<sup>5</sup> Within this collection is the Armeno-Georgian palimpsest Graz, Universitätsbibliothek, MS 2058/2, which is, to date, one of the best known and most studied codices among those comprising an Armenian undertext and a Georgian overtext.<sup>6</sup> This latter transmits a Georgian Psalter and part of the Biblical Odes,<sup>7</sup> while the Armenian lower layer witnesses to the Armenian version of the Gospel of John together with a collection of 279 extant “oracle sayings” (or *puḥunuqmizuli*), out of the original 318 oracles.<sup>8</sup> The codicological structure of the codex has already been thoroughly described by Erich Renhart,<sup>9</sup> who also published the text of the whole set of oracles that he was able to read without multispectral images.<sup>10</sup>

The codex at present consists of 283 leaves measuring *c.* 135 × 100 mm. The folios are all palimpsested, except for fols 1–4. These latter show a different script, hand, and ink from the rest of the Georgian text—they are written in *nuskhuri* minuscule and, for the headings and the beginnings of verses, in *asomtavruli* majuscule—, suggesting that the first quire of the palimpsested Georgian book was replaced at a later stage with a new one, perhaps by the famous scribe and bookbinder Ioane Zosime.<sup>11</sup> The Georgian Psalter was probably written in the 9<sup>th</sup> or 10<sup>th</sup> century and appears in full page, with 12 or 16 lines per page. The original Armenian codex was thought to have been copied in the 8<sup>th</sup> century. A recent <sup>14</sup>C (or radiocarbon) analysis of the manuscript undertaken in 2024/2025 on behalf of the “DeLiCaTe” project and conducted at the Federal Institute for Technology (ETH) in Zürich indicates that the parchment dates to a period comprised in between the years 482 and 605, most probably around the year 565.<sup>12</sup> The lower layer is also written in full page, in a slightly slanted *erkat’agir* (Armenian majuscule; see Fig. 1). Sometimes in the 9<sup>th</sup> or 10<sup>th</sup> century the manuscript was palimpsested, rotated by 90°, and lightly trimmed, before accommodating a copy of the Georgian Psalter. While this latter only reused material from the Armenian palimpsested codex, some twenty folios of the original codex are now missing.

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<sup>5</sup> For details, see Renhart (2022: 50).

<sup>6</sup> See the groundbreaking study by Renhart (2015), which supersedes Renhart (2009), and the most recent Renhart (2025), all with further references.

<sup>7</sup> For the Georgian text see Imnaishvili (2004).

<sup>8</sup> According to Renhart, the only other known Armenian manuscript witnessing to the same textual content, i.e. the combination of the Gospel of John and the oracle sayings, sometimes called “Divining Gospel Book”, is the codex Yerevan, Matenadaran, M 9640; see Renhart (2024).

<sup>9</sup> Renhart (2015: 14–38, 48–58) for, respectively, the Georgian upper layer and the Armenian lower layer.

<sup>10</sup> Renhart (2015: 115–143). In 2024 the manuscript has been object of an multispectral imaging campaign that took place at the Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures of the University of Hamburg within the scope of the “DeLiCaTe” project. Renhart is currently studying anew the Armenian undertext and preparing an edition of the Gospel of John contained in this manuscript based on the newly available images.

<sup>11</sup> Renhart (2022: 52).

<sup>12</sup> On the difficulty of dating the Armenian layer of this codex on palaeographical ground, see Renhart (2025: 236–239); on the definitive radiocarbon dating of this manuscript, see Gippert, this volume, who also provides a conveniently quick overview of all previous dating hypotheses. Gippert states that this is, to date, the second oldest securely dated Armenian manuscript (the oldest one is housed in the Matenadaran).

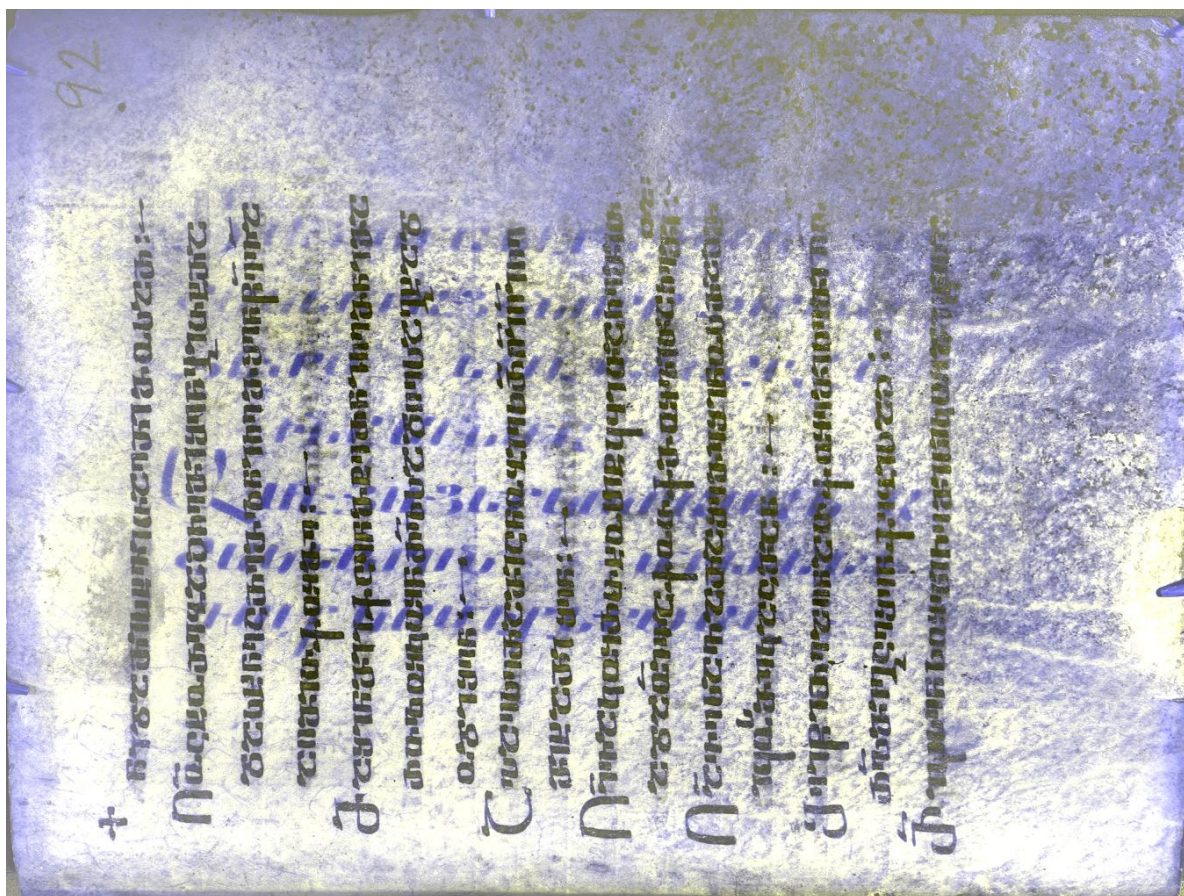


Fig 1: Graz, Universitätsbibliothek, MS 2058/2, fol. 92r (pseudo-colour rendering of multispectral image)

The modern history of this codex has been reconstructed in considerable detail and scholars have ascertained its Sinaitic provenance.<sup>13</sup> In spite of that, Renhart has often stressed that a Sinaitic origin does not warrant also a Sinaitic origin. Indeed, while the palimpsestation of the original Armenian codex may have occurred at St Catherine's Monastery, it is very unlikely that the origin of the early Armenian layer is also to be sought on Mount Sinai, for the monastery "has never had a tradition as being the place where a great number of Armenian manuscripts were kept".<sup>14</sup> This methodological point of separating the provenance of a palimpsested manuscript from the origin of the pre-palimpsested codex should be kept in mind when discussing any palimpsested manuscript and applies to all other items discussed below in this article.

While the Armenian version of the Gospel of John transmitted in the lower layer of this codex is not, in itself, a rare text, Renhart has showed not only that the text of this manuscript witnesses to interesting variant readings and that its pericopation of the Biblical text differs from what is generally known, but that the combination of the Gospel of John with a set of Armenian oracles makes this an exemplar of considerable significance. Indeed, this palimpsest represents the oldest Armenian witness to a kind of divinatory Biblical books which, while developed from earlier pre-Christian practices and once widespread also in other medieval language traditions (such as, for instance, Greek, Latin, Coptic, and Syriac), were at some point

<sup>13</sup> On the history of this manuscript, see Imnaishvili (2008a and 2008b), Renhart (2022: 51), and the resumé in Renhart (2015: 14). On the collections of Georgian manuscripts in Austria, see Imnaishvili (1977).

<sup>14</sup> Renhart (2022: 51).



shun by the official Church.<sup>15</sup> When hypothesising the reasons laying behind the palimpsestation of the original Armenian manuscript, Renhart consequently considers the fact that divinatory Biblical books were forbidden by the official Church as one of three possible explanations. The other two would be the fact that in each page only ca. half of the parchment was covered by writing, an economic condition that would make the text to erase relatively little, and the fact that the Armenian manuscript might have ended up in the hands of a non-Armenian community (and therefore be useless).<sup>16</sup>

### 2.1.2 Sinai, St Catherine's Monastery, Sin. georg. NF 13 and 55

Next to the Graz palimpsest just discussed, the other best known and studied Armeno-Georgian palimpsests are two items preserved in the library of St Catherine's Monastery on Mount Sinai, in Egypt. After the Vatican, this library houses one of the largest monastic collections of manuscripts in the world. Standing as the oldest Christian library continually in use, this institution and its heritage of multilingual books are living witnesses to the various communities of monks that at specific points in the history of the monastery worshipped within its walls.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, the number of manuscripts contained in this library amounts to more than 4,500 codices.<sup>18</sup> Of these, ca. 1,200 belong to the so-called New Finds,<sup>19</sup> a heterogenous collection of manuscript fragments, of which at least 170 are palimpsested, that were discovered by chance after a fire destroyed a room located against the northern wall of the compound in 1975.<sup>20</sup> The two Armeno-Georgian palimpsests housed in St Catherine's Monastery belong to these New Finds and undoubtedly represent two of its most celebrated manuscripts: these are MSS Sin. georg. NF 13 and 55.

Although nowadays they represent two separate items, these two palimpsests are often presented together because it has been proved that Sin. georg. NF 55 was once part of NF 13,<sup>21</sup> but also because in parts of their lower writings they preserve the only known extant manuscript texts in Caucasian Albanian.<sup>22</sup>

Manuscript Sin. georg. NF 13 consists of 107 folios measuring ca. 220 × 150 mm. The overtext contains Georgian ascetical and hagiographical material written in *nuskhuri* by a certain Mikael sometimes in the 10<sup>th</sup> or 11<sup>th</sup> century. The lower text transmits texts in Armenian, Caucasian Albanian (Gospel of John and parts of a Jerusalem-rite Lectionary), as well as a hagiographical Georgian text penned in *asomtavruli*.<sup>23</sup> The Armenian lower text is in *erkat'agir* majuscules and occupies two blocks. The first is at folios 52–53, 62–63, 71–72, which transmit fragments

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<sup>15</sup> Renhart (2024: 77); see also Outtier (1993).

<sup>16</sup> Renhart (2022: 56).

<sup>17</sup> On the history of St Catherine's Monastery and its library see, among others, Forsyth & Weitzmann (1973), Mango (2011), Justin Sinaites (2017), and Rossetto (2023).

<sup>18</sup> Although more than half are in Greek, the monastery also houses codices in all the most known languages of the Christian Orient, as well as in Christian Palestinian Aramaic, Persian, and Polish.

<sup>19</sup> For more details, see Rossetto (2023: 14).

<sup>20</sup> While the discovery was first announced in 1978, the palimpsests of St Catherine's collections have since been at the centre of an international research project led by Michael Phelps and Claudia Rapp that run from 2012 to 2017. For a history of the project and a selection of the first outcomes see Rapp *et al.* (2023). Multispectral images of the palimpsests from Sinai are available at <https://sinaiipalimpsests.org/>.

<sup>21</sup> Information on both items is taken from Gippert *et al.* (2008), Gippert (2010), and <https://sinai.library.ucla.edu/>.

<sup>22</sup> For an overview on the state of the art on these texts see Gippert (2023a). For the history, contexts, and culture of the Caucasias Albanians, see the updated handbook Gippert & Dum-Tragut (2023).

<sup>23</sup> For the identification of the Georgian undertext see Gippert (2022b); for details on the codicological structure of Sin. georg. NF 13 in general see the dedicated entry at <https://sinai.library.ucla.edu/>.

of Pauline Epistles with the Euthalian apparatus (see Fig. 2). The second, also in *erkat'agir*, is located at folios 79–95 and contains fragments from the *Works of Solomon* (or *Paulip Unghnūh*).<sup>24</sup> Both texts have provisionally been dated on palaeographical grounds to the 8<sup>th</sup> or 9<sup>th</sup> centuries.

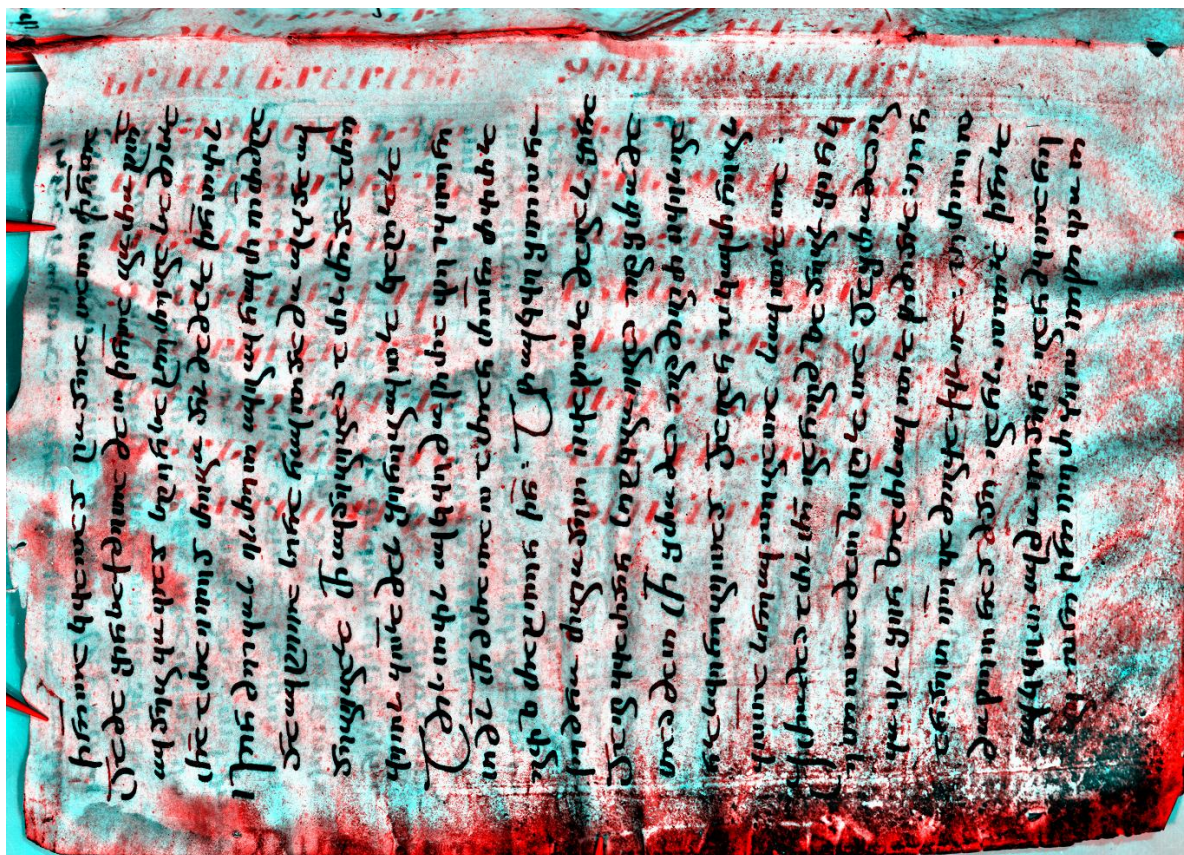


Fig 2: Sin. georg. NF 13, fol. 52v (pseudo-colour rendering of multispectral image)

Manuscript Sin. georg. NF 55 consists of 78 folios measuring ca. 220 × 150 mm. The overtext transmits a copy of the *Apophtegmata Patrum* in Georgian, also written by the same Mikael of Sin. georg. NF 13. The lower layers of this codex include texts in Armenian, Caucasian Albanian (other parts of the same texts of NF 13), and Christian Palestinian Aramaic (Gospel of Matthew).<sup>25</sup> The Armenian lower layer is entirely in *erkat'agir* and consists of fragments of three texts. Folio 64 contains fragments of the *Epistle to the Hebrews* dated to the 9<sup>th</sup> or 10<sup>th</sup> centuries (see Fig. 3);<sup>26</sup> folios 28–29 and 37–38 transmit other fragments of the same Pauline epistles with Euthalian apparatus dated to the 8<sup>th</sup> or 9<sup>th</sup> centuries as Sin. georg. NF 13; and folios 43–61 contain other parts of the same *Works of Solomon* as found in NF 13 and, therefore, also date to the 8<sup>th</sup> or 9<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>24</sup> For the Armenian texts of this manuscript, see Gippert (2010).

<sup>25</sup> For the identification of the Christian Palestinian Aramaic text see Müller-Kessler (2025: 148–149); for details on the codicological structure of Sin. georg. NF 55 in general see the dedicated entry at <https://sinai.library.ucla.edu/>.

<sup>26</sup> See Gippert (2023b).

<sup>27</sup> See the edition in Gippert (2010).



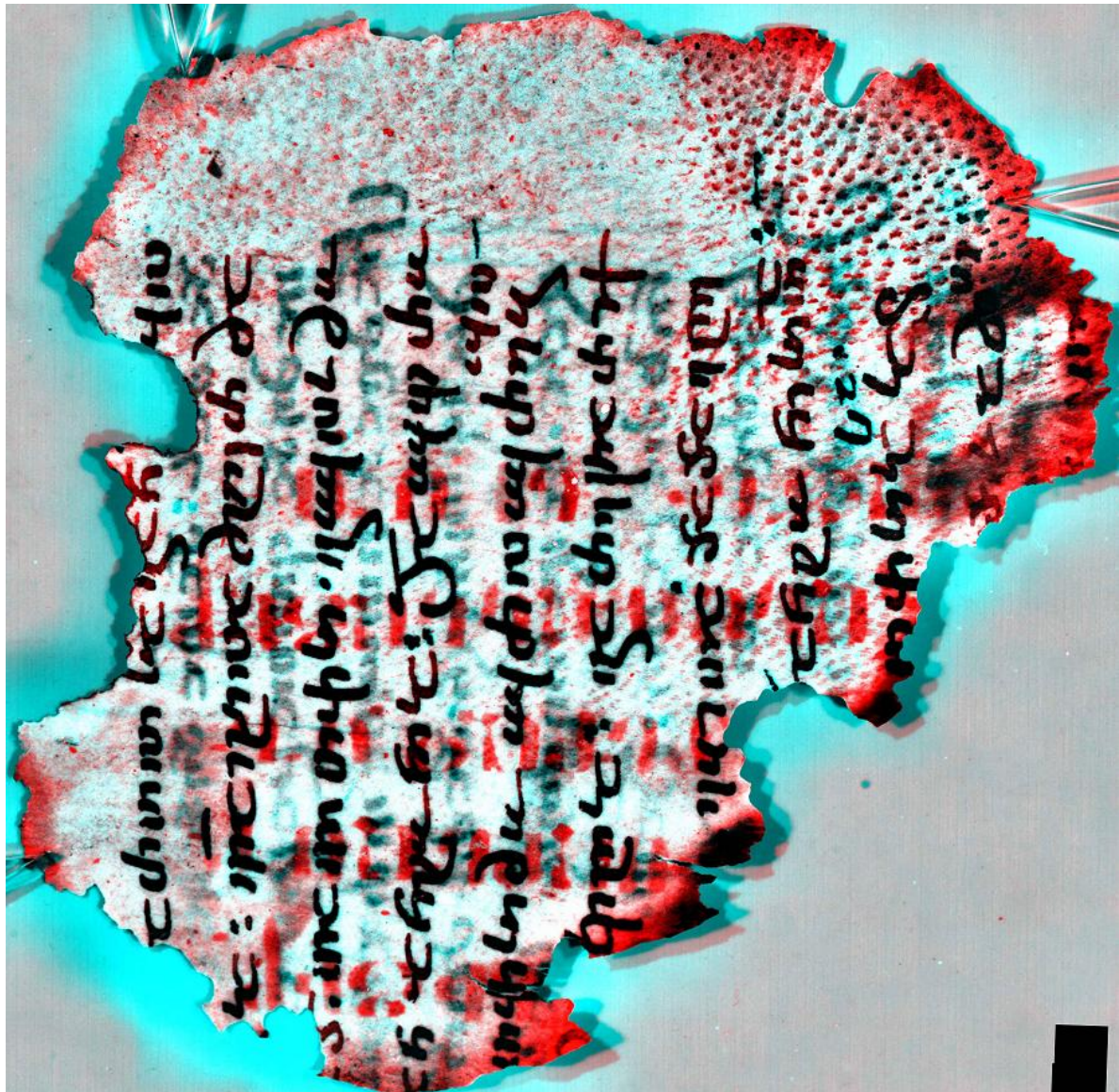


Fig 3: Sin. georg. NF 55, fol. 64v (pseudo-colour rendering of multispectral image)

### 2.1.3 Tbilisi, Korneli Kekelidze Georgian National Centre of Manuscripts

Located in Tbilisi, the Korneli Kekelidze Georgian National Centre of Manuscripts (hereafter: NCM) is the largest depository of Georgian manuscripts in the world and, therefore, also in the land. It houses ca. 9,000 Georgian codices and 309 Armenian manuscripts, among several other smaller collections of manuscripts written in other languages.<sup>28</sup> Differently from other manuscripts collections that are still (even if at times only partially) hosted in the same location where they were first assembled or created—as, for instance, the manuscript collections preserved in the Monastery of St Catherine on Mount Sinai, Iviron Monastery on Mount Athos, or the Monastery of the Holy Cross in Jerusalem<sup>29</sup>—, the manuscripts currently housed in

<sup>28</sup> For a general introduction to libraries and depositories containing collections of Georgian manuscripts and, more specifically, to this centre see Gippert (2015). For the Armenian manuscripts preserved in this institution, see Coulie (2020: 335–336) and also Gaprindashvili, Chitunashvili & Khositashvili (2025).

<sup>29</sup> The manuscripts once housed in this latter are, however, now kept in the Greek Patriarchate of Jerusalem.

Tbilisi entered this depository from both Georgia (in its current borders) and elsewhere, e.g. Anatolia. Within the walls of the NCM, two Georgian manuscripts belonging to the ‘A’ collection, i.e. the collection once housed in the former Ecclesiastical Museum, contain Armenian texts in their lower layers: NCM A-491 and A-495.

### 2.1.3.1 NCM A-491

Manuscript NCM A-491 is an important Armeno-Georgian palimpsest, whose special significance lies in being one of the earliest, if fragmentary, witnesses to the Armenian version of Agathangelos’ *History of the Armenians*.<sup>30</sup> The Armenian lower layer of this codex has already been the object of a thorough study by Zaza Aleksidze and Dali Chitunashvili who, in addition to providing a detailed codicological description which I follow below, also published those parts of the text that they were able to read with the naked eye or with the sole help of a lamp of Wood.<sup>31</sup>

In its current state, this manuscript, which was once housed in Svetitskhoveli Cathedral (Mtskheta), consists of 108 folios, measuring 234 × 180 mm, 35 of which are palimpsested.<sup>32</sup> The codex is in poor conditions today, being without a cover, unbound, and showing lacunae in its quire structure. The Georgian upper layer lacks its colophon, due to mutilation, and has therefore been dated only paleographically to the 13<sup>th</sup>/14<sup>th</sup> century. The Georgian text, which was written rotating the palimpsest by 90°, transmits a copy of the *Festal Menaion* and was written by an otherwise unknown Lat’avri.<sup>33</sup>

Aleksidze and Chitunashvili have calculated that the original Armenian manuscript should have measured approximately 460 × 240 mm (two pages of the Georgian text representing one page of the original Armenian manuscript).<sup>34</sup> This original codex was written in two columns of 21/22 lines in a large and round *erkat’agir* majuscule.<sup>35</sup> The text presents characteristic punctuation signs and palaeographical features—including, among others, smaller letter-size for text subtitles and parallel citation marks—which the two scholars believe to be a sign of its old age, presumably the 9<sup>th</sup> century. The identified text, which includes portions of Agathangelos comprised between §§ 781–874 of the 1909 Tbilisi edition of the *History of the Armenians*,<sup>36</sup> aligns on the whole with the text of manuscripts α, β, b, U, P of the Tbilisi edition,

<sup>30</sup> I.e. the version usually known as “Aa”. For an overview of the various versions of Agathangelos’ *History* in both Armenian and other medieval languages, see the synthesis in Winkler (1980).

<sup>31</sup> I received this information orally by Dali Chitunashvili—whom I thank here—during my stay at the NCM in Tbilisi in Summer 2025. A palaeographical analysis of the earliest surviving witnesses to Agathangelos’ *History* (including—in addition to MS A-491—the famous “Vienna Agathangelos”, i.e. the palimpsested codex Vienna, Mekhitarist Library, MS 56; Yerevan, Matenadaran, M 1235; Tbilisi, NCM, Arm. 18; and other early fragments in *erkat’agir*) is currently being prepared jointly by the author of these pages and Dali Chitunashvili. For the description of the lower layer and partial edition of the Armenian text see Aleksidze & Chitunashvili (2020).

<sup>32</sup> According to Aleksidze & Chitunashvili (2020: 199) these are: fols 5, 6, 38, 40–41, 45, 48–50, 55, 57–58, 60, 63, 65, 66, 68, 71, 73–74, 76–77, 79, 81–82, 85–86, 89–90, 96–97, 100–101, 107–108.

<sup>33</sup> See Metreveli (1986: 232–235).

<sup>34</sup> Further details concerning other codicological and palaeographical measurements of the lower layer are provided in Aleksidze & Chitunashvili (2020: 200).

<sup>35</sup> A pseudo-colour photograph of this codex has recently been published in Gaprindashvili, Chitunashvili & Khositashvili (2025: 18–19), where the Armenian undertext is dated to the 8<sup>th</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> century. I thank Khatuna Gaprindashvili for providing me with a fresh copy of the book.

<sup>36</sup> Agathangelos (1909). Interestingly, the extant text contained in the palimpsest known as the “Vienna Agathangelos” extends only from §§ 3 to 341. Although no final conclusion has yet been reached, a first palaeographical inspection of MS A-491 (conducted *in situ* in June 2015 by me and Dali Chitunashvili) seems to

though at times it also contains readings that are absent from both the main text and the apparatus of that edition.

### 2.1.3.2 NCM A-495

Manuscript NCM A-495 is a palimpsested codex consisting of 198 folios measuring 120 × 95 mm and wrapped by a brown leather cover.<sup>37</sup> The Georgian upper layer contains a copy of the Gospels of Matthew and John and, the colophon being lost, is dated on palaeographical grounds to the 12<sup>th</sup>/13<sup>th</sup> centuries. According to Metreveli's catalogue, twelve folios of this codex, namely fols 186–197, are palimpsested and contain, in the Armenian lower writing, a copy of the Armenian version of the Jerusalem Lectionary, which has been dated to the 9<sup>th</sup>/10<sup>th</sup> centuries, perhaps on the ground that it is written in a large *erkat'agir*.<sup>38</sup> The text so far identified consists of pericopes to be read during the Great Lent, which include at least Exodus 2:21–22 and Joel 2:1–11.<sup>39</sup>

### 2.1.4 Tbilisi, National Archives of Georgia, MSS 1446/322, 1448/1976, and 1448/5016

After the NCM, the National Archives of Georgia represent the second largest depository of manuscripts in the city of Tbilisi. Originally established in 1920, this institution hosts a heterogenous collection of items, including archival written documents (charters, letters, legal and official documents), films, photographs, as well as sound records, ranging from medieval to modern times.<sup>40</sup> Among their written records, the National Archives also house a collection of almost one thousand Georgian manuscripts, dating from the 9<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Of this collection—which, besides, includes some fifty Armenian codices too—,<sup>41</sup> there figure three palimpsested manuscripts containing an Armenian lower layer and a Georgian overtext, namely MSS 1446/322, 1448/1976, and 1448/5016. None of these three items has yet been the object of a detailed study nor of a multispectral imaging campaign.<sup>42</sup>

MS 1446/322 is a rather damaged manuscript of 41 folios measuring 200 × 130 mm, which was brought to Tbilisi from Tsalka in Kvemo-Kartli.<sup>43</sup> The Georgian upper layer consists of a 13<sup>th</sup>/14<sup>th</sup> century copy of Bible readings for the Lenten time, while the lower Armenian layer

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rule out the possibility of considering this Tbilisi witness as the same manuscript (i.e. the final part) of the “Vienna Agathangelos”. Further study is, however, necessary before confirming or refuting this hypothesis. A new study on the “Vienna Agathangelos” based on a set of multispectral images is currently being prepared by the author of these pages. For a preliminary overview, see Bonfiglio (2025).

<sup>37</sup> Metreveli (1986: 239). Gaprindashvili, Chitunashvili & Khositashvili (2025: 20) give a different size for this manuscript (namely 200 × 195 mm).

<sup>38</sup> See Gaprindashvili, Chitunashvili, and Khositashvili (2025: 20–21), who also provide two colour photographs of the codex.

<sup>39</sup> See Gaprindashvili & Khositashvili (2013: 28 and 207), who inadvertently note Job instead of Joel.

<sup>40</sup> See <https://archive.gov.ge/>.

<sup>41</sup> See Melikset-Bek (1958).

<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, none of these manuscripts is described in the 3-vols catalogue by Asatiani, Kavtaria & Chitunashvili (vol. 1, 2016), Abzalava *et al.* (vol. 2, 2018), and Asatiani & Chitunashvili (vol. 3, 2019).

<sup>43</sup> This is the number of folios according to UNESCO (2018: 52); however, the description provided by Kakabadze & Gagoshidze (1949: 292–293) names only 40 folios.



witnesses to one form of the many stages of the Armenian version of the Jerusalem Lectionary.<sup>44</sup>

As for MSS 1448/1976 and 1448/5016, these items have not yet been the object of a detailed codicological description. However, according to the published images, MS 1448/1976 seems to contain two palimpsested folios, and MS 1448/5016 perhaps seven.<sup>45</sup> In both cases, the Armenian undertext still remains unidentified.<sup>46</sup> Finally, a short note found in Bernard Coulie's *Armenian Manuscripts* simply states that these two items are '2 palimpsest mss with lower text in Armenian writing'.<sup>47</sup>

## 2.2 Georgian Palimpsested Manuscripts with Armenian Upper Layer

Compared to the (so far) known eight Armeno-Georgian palimpsests with an Armenian lower and a Georgian upper text which today are found in institutions scattered among Georgia, Austria, and Mount Sinai, those containing a Georgian lower and an Armenian upper text amount to only three and are all housed in the same country and depository: the Matenadaran of Yerevan. Although the total number of items equals to eight for the first group of manuscripts and three for the latter, a better indication of the quantity of material palimpsested within each language tradition can be better appreciated when looking not at the number of codices but at the total number of folios that are actually palimpsested. According to the published data,<sup>48</sup> this gives a total of 419 Armenian folios palimpsested with a Georgian overtext vs 227 Georgian folios palimpsested with an Armenian overtext. Differently from the first group of palimpsests, those comprising a Georgian undertext and an Armenian upper layer are currently much less studied.

### 2.2.1 Yerevan, Matenadaran, MMS 6141, 6705, and 8624

Of the ca. 31,000 extant Armenian manuscripts worldwide, one third, i.e. about 11,000, are housed in the largest and most prominent depository of Armenian manuscripts: the Matenadaran of Yerevan, whose official name is actually the Mesrop Mashtots Institute of Ancient Manuscripts.<sup>49</sup> Indeed, this library is unique in the world, for in addition to being a depository of manuscripts, it is also a centre for the preservation and restauration of books, a museum, a research centre, and a learning institution. In addition to its well-known collection of Armenian manuscripts,<sup>50</sup> the Matenadaran contains as well relatively minor, but important collections of manuscripts in other languages, including Georgian.

<sup>44</sup> Information from <https://www.fdr.uni-hamburg.de/record/16949>. For an overview of the early stages of the development of Armenian lectionaries, see Gippert & Sargsyan (forthcoming).

<sup>45</sup> See the short descriptions with images in UNESCO (2018: 48–49 and 50–51). The catalogues by Kakabadze & Gagoshidze (1949–1950) and Asatiani, Kavtaria & Chitunashvili (2016), Abralava *et al.* (2018), and Asatiani & Chitunashvili (2019) do not mention these two items.

<sup>46</sup> See <https://www.fdr.uni-hamburg.de/record/16949>.

<sup>47</sup> Coulie (2020: 329), where the author acknowledges Dali Chitunashvili for having passed him this information in June 2018.

<sup>48</sup> See note 4 above.

<sup>49</sup> For an overview of all the Armenian collections around the world, including the Matenadaran, see Kouymjian (2015); for references to the catalogues and specific studies of this latter and other depositories of Armenian manuscripts, see Coulie (2020: 388–402).

<sup>50</sup> For research on the Armenian palimpsests preserved in the Matenadaran see Gippert (2022a) and Gippert (2024).

For the manuscripts discussed in this paragraph that contain a Georgian lower layer and an Armenian uppertext, no detailed description has yet been published, for the 11<sup>th</sup> volume of the ongoing *General Catalogue* (*Uuyh Sniguly*) of the Matenadaran has reached only manuscript number 3,700.<sup>51</sup> All descriptions provided below are based on the second volume of the older *Manuscripts Catalogue* (*Sniguly ātḡnuqnuḡ*) of the Matenadaran, which was published in 1970.<sup>52</sup> As it is well known, the entries of this catalogue can be extremely short as succinct, at times even cryptic, and often occupy just a few lines. The information that follows therefore reflects this state of affairs.

According to the catalogue of 1970, MS 6141 is a 16<sup>th</sup>-century Armenian Horologion (ծաճազհրք) and Missal (Խոսիքդաստեղծ) consisting of 141 folios of 110 × 80 mm.<sup>53</sup> The Armenian overtext is written in *bolorgir* and occupies full pages of 17 lines each. The catalogue does mention that this codex is a Georgian palimpsest but does not provide its content. Thanks to multispectral imaging, it is now known that 55 folios of this codex (namely folios 80–106, 112–117a, and 120–141) are palimpsested and that the text transmitted in their lower writing (or at least part of it) contains Georgian hymnographic material (see Fig. 4).<sup>54</sup>

Manuscript M 6705 is catalogued as an Armenian Gospel book and dates to the year 1679.<sup>55</sup> The codex, whose provenance is Verin Zakam in Artsakh, is in paper and consists of 264 folios measuring 207 × 150 mm. The text, in *bolorgir*, is written in two columns of 21 lines each. The decoration includes miniatures of the evangelists Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and, in addition to half-arcs illustrations, also a number of marginal ornaments. The flyleaves of this manuscript are in parchment and palimpsested (pp. 1–4). The Armenian upper layer of the flyleaves is in *nōtrgir* and contains at least a prayer, while the Georgian lower text witnesses to a fragment of the Georgian Euchologion (see Fig. 5).<sup>56</sup>

As for Manuscript M 8624, this has been described as a Festal Book (*Solugnyg*) and Horologion (ծաճազհրք).<sup>57</sup> It was written in the year 1663 by a priest called Abraham in Verngiwl (Վերնգիւղ), i.e. in the Tortum region (Թորթում), which today corresponds to a district of Erzurum. The codex consists of 167 folios, entirely palimpsested, measuring 93 × 70 mm. The writing is a *bolorgir* written in full page, with 16 lines per page. The codex contains three flyleaves (pp. 1–6), which are not palimpsested (see Fig. 6). The lower Georgian text of the core of the codex transmits a copy of the Gospels in Georgian written in *asomtavruli* majuscules (see Fig. 7), while the flyleaves contain fragments of the first homily *In exaltationem sanctae crucis* by Andrew of Crete written in *nuskhuri* (d. 740).<sup>58</sup>

<sup>51</sup> See Ter-Vardanean & Gasparyan (2024).

<sup>52</sup> Eganyan, Zeytownyan & Antabyan (1970).

<sup>53</sup> Eganyan, Zeytownyan & Antabyan (1970: 258).

<sup>54</sup> See note 4 above.

<sup>55</sup> Eganyan, Zeytownyan & Antabyan (1970: 376).

<sup>56</sup> See note 4 above.

<sup>57</sup> Eganyan, Zeytownyan & Antabyan (1970: 783).

<sup>58</sup> The original Greek text of this homily is printed in *Patrologia Graeca* 97: 1017–1036. The analysis of the multispectral images of this manuscript has not yet been completed. As a consequence, only parts of the Georgian lower writings have been identified and transcribed or edited.



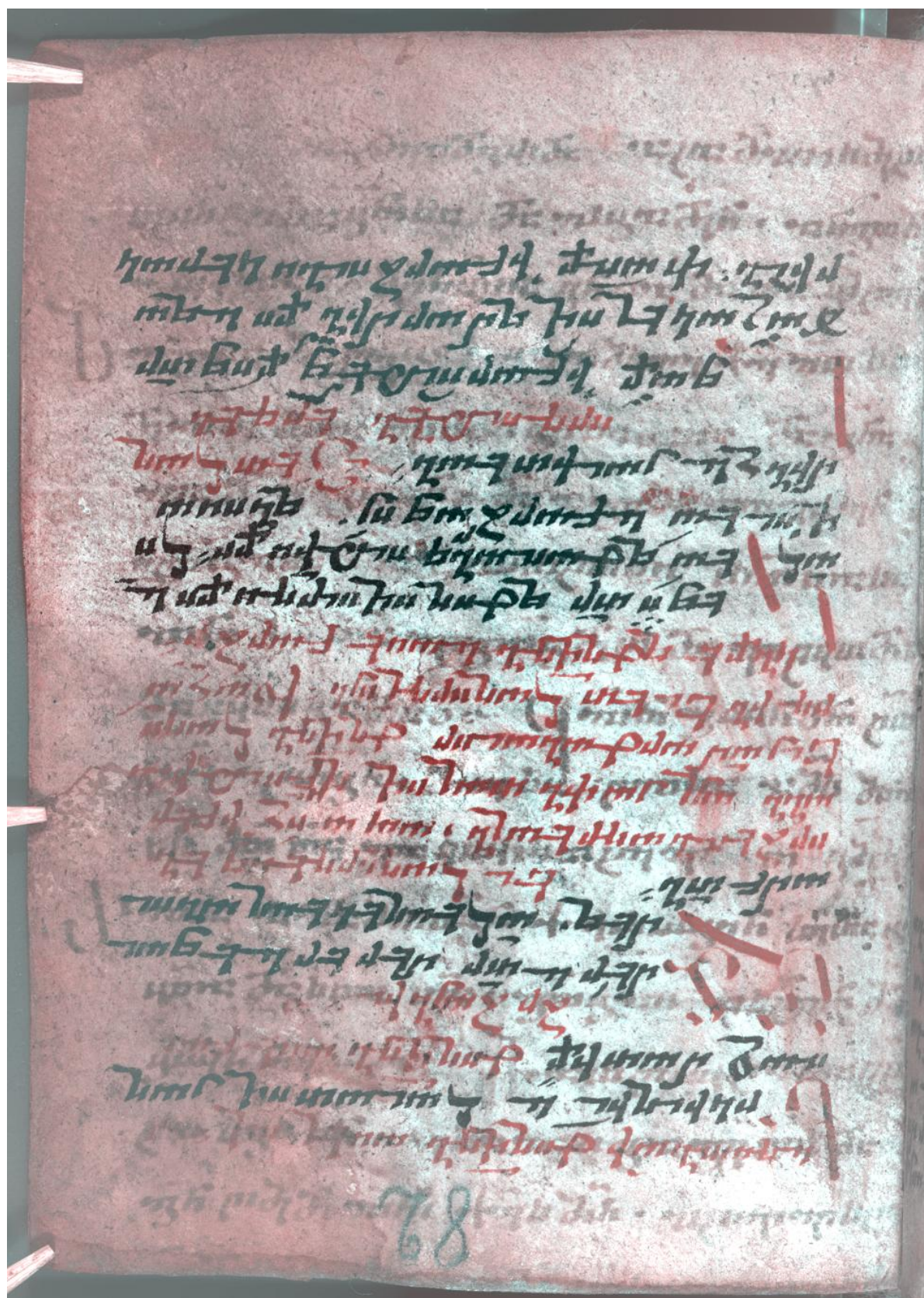


Fig 4: Yerevan, Matenadaran, M 6141, fol. 82r (pseudo-colour rendering of multispectral image)





Fig 5: Yerevan, Matenadaran, M 6705, p. 3 (PCA rendering of multispectral image)

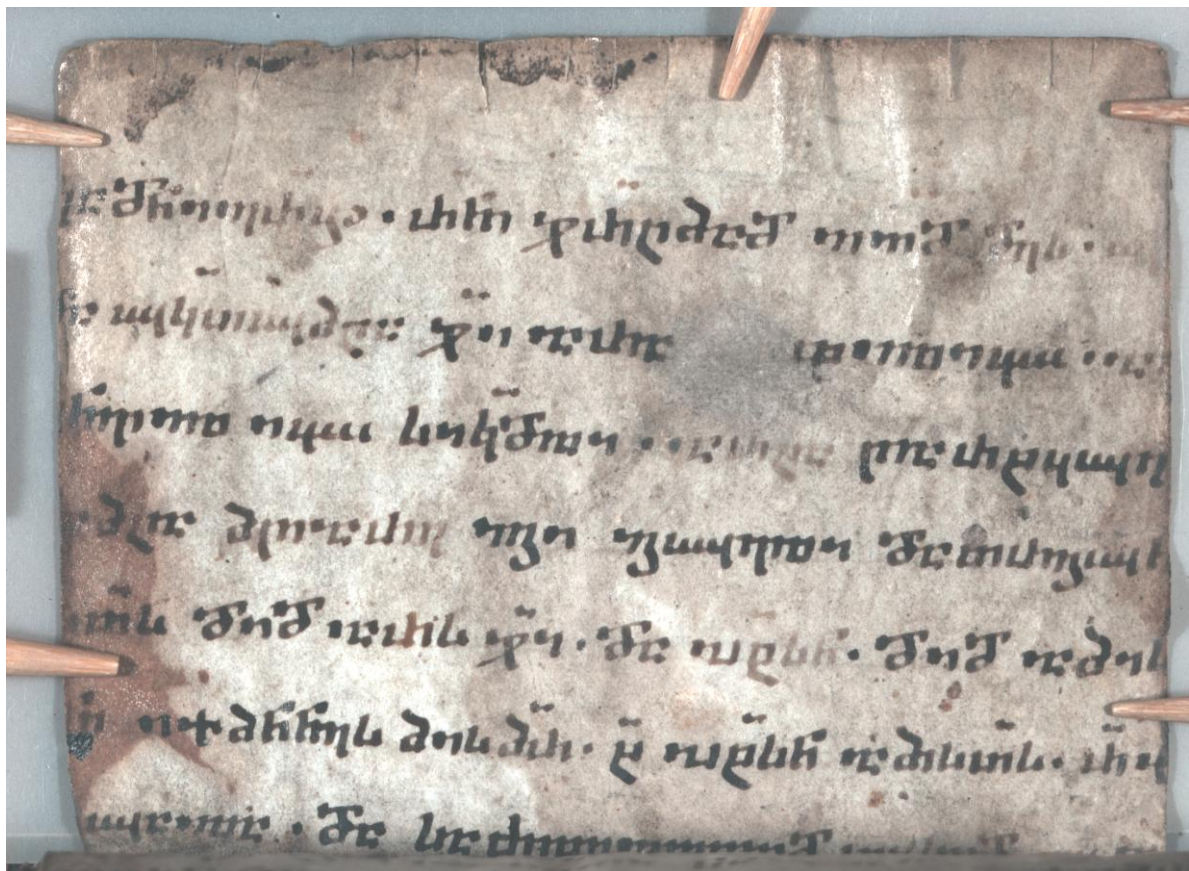


Fig 6: Yerevan, Matenadaran, M 8624, flyleaf p. 2 (colour image)



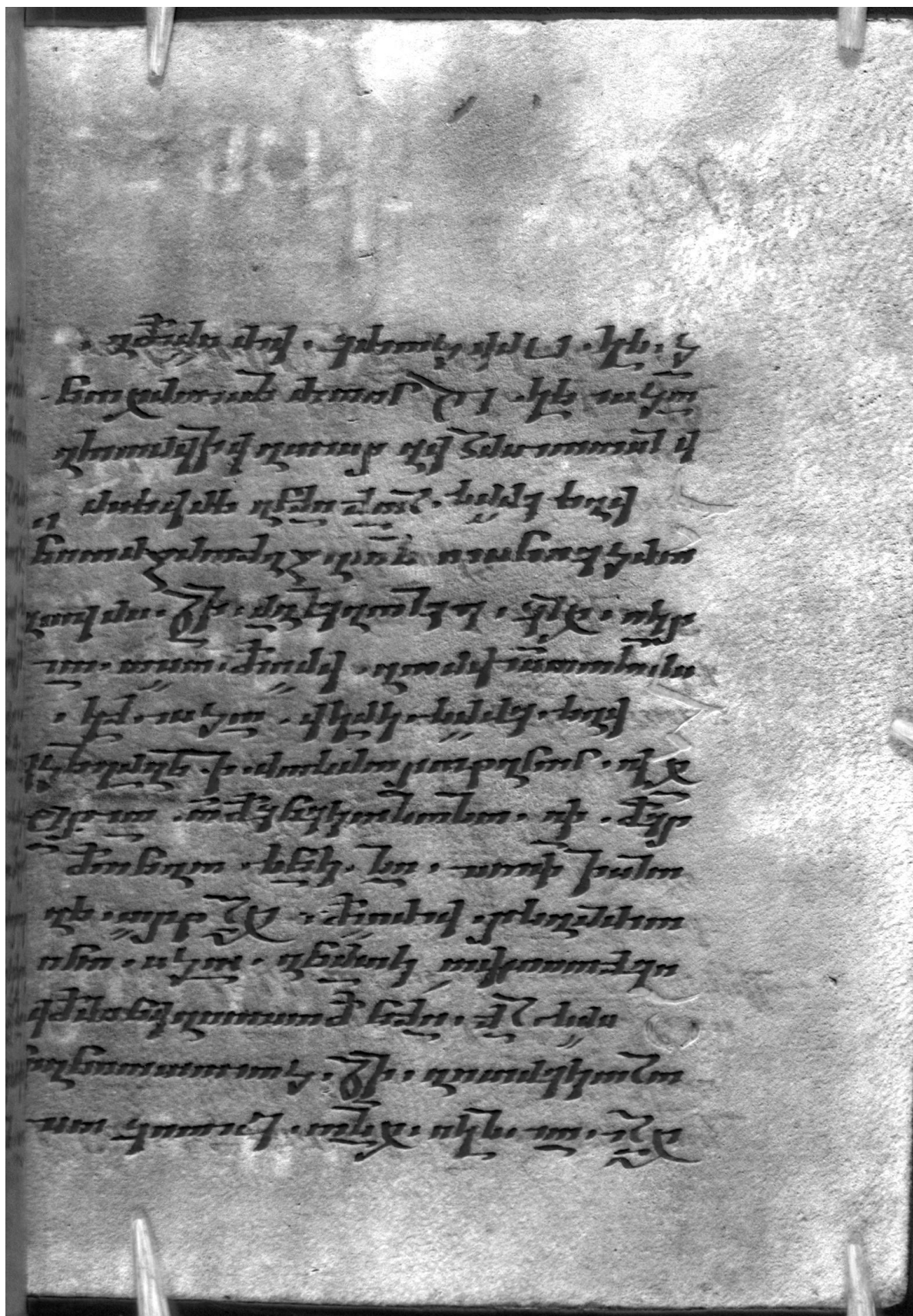


Fig 7: Yerevan, Matenadaran, M 8624, fol. 20v (PCA rendering of multispectral image)



### 3. Summary and Avenues for Future Research

The survey of Armeno-Georgian manuscripts presented and discussed in this article clearly shows that historically reused manuscripts in both Armenian and Georgian belong to either manuscript tradition. From a chronological point of view, although for certain manuscripts we still lack vital data (namely for the three manuscripts Tbilisi, National Archives of Georgia, MSS 1446/322, 1448/1976, and 1448/5016), the available evidence shows that while Armenians reused earlier Georgian codices in either the 16<sup>th</sup> (Yerevan, Matenadaran, M 6141) or the 17<sup>th</sup> centuries (Yerevan, Matenadaran, M 6705 and M 8624), Georgians palimpsested Armenian manuscripts centuries earlier, either in the 9<sup>th</sup> or 10<sup>th</sup> centuries (this is the case of all Sinaitic manuscripts, including the Graz palimpsest), or in the 12<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> centuries (as it is the case of the two manuscripts preserved in the Korneli Kekelidze Georgian National Centre of Manuscripts).

While historians would be tempted to use such data to hypothesize on the nature of Armeno-Georgian relations throughout history, any working hypothesis should be weary of some methodological caveats. First of all, as already pointed out by Erich Renhart, one should distinguish between provenance and origin of a manuscript.<sup>59</sup> Indeed, while a manuscript may have been found and preserved in, for instance, St Catherine's Monastery, there is no guarantee that the manuscript was written there, unless the colophon says so. If we consider palimpsests as complex objects, the sole presence of two texts involves investigating not only the provenance and origin of the upper layer of the manuscript—which is sometimes, though not always, possible, thanks to colophons—but also those of the lower writing, which is at present impossible because, to my knowledge, none of the Armeno-Georgian palimpsests discussed above preserves any colophon in the lower writing of either languages.


Next to the geographical information and in the absence of internal data concerning the origin or provenance of the lower writing, all we are left with is to at least try to figure out the chronological sequence of each palimpsest. This investigation involves finding out the date or time of writing of the lower writing, the whereabouts of the manuscript between the time it was written and the time in which it was bought, taken, or acquired by another language community, the moment of its palimpsestation and rewriting of the upper layer, and, as in the case of the lower layer, the travels or usage of the newly reconstituted manuscript between its rewriting and the moment of the “last” travel, the one occurring between its “location of provenance” and its “definitive”, or better current, “storage”.

In order to answer important historical questions such as the reasons and circumstances laying behind the palimpsestation of manuscripts by their new owners, be they Armenians or Georgians, the crucial steps to tackle are to find out first the approximate time of writing of the lower layer, which is now possible by means of <sup>14</sup>C analysis, and then to try to localise the possible geographical origin of the lower layer by means of a combination of philological data together with parchment and ink analyses. Only then the full potential of Armeno-Georgian palimpsests for the study of the relations between these two Christian nations will be fully exploited.

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<sup>59</sup> See 2.1.1 above.

## Acknowledgements

This publication is part of a project that has received funding from the European Research Council under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (grant agreement no. 101019006) and from the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (German Research Foundation) under Germany's Excellence Strategy – EXC 2176 ‘Understanding Written Artefacts: Material, Interaction and Transmission in Manuscript Cultures’, project no. 390893796  DFG. This research was conducted within the scope of the Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures at the University of Hamburg. A draft of this article was first presented at the ASIAC XIX Conference at Ca' Foscari (Venice) in December 2025, during the sessions #15&18 “Armenia and Georgia: A Millennia-Old Proximity”, organized by Nazénie Garibian, Paolo Lucca, and Anna Sirinian. I wish to thank these colleagues for instigating the idea behind the topic of this article. Dali Chitunashvili and Khatuna Gaprindashvili, Bernard Outtier, Jost Gippert and all my colleagues of the “DeLiCaTe” project provided invaluable assistance and insight, showing great generosity in sharing information and data otherwise unavailable or still unpublished: may they all be warmly thanked here.

## Picture credits

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Figs 2 and 3: The Sinai Palimpsest Project, © St. Catherine's Monastery, Sinai, Egypt

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## სომხურ-ქართული კავშირები პალიმფსესტური ხელნაწერების პრიზმაში

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პირველი ათასწლეულის განმავლობაში სომხებისა და ქართველების მიერ შექმნილი ლიტერატურული მემკვიდრეობა ორ ერს შორის ურთიერთკავშირის ნათელ მტკიცებულებას წარმოადგენს, რომელიც ერთმანეთთან მუდმივ კონტაქტში ვითარდებოდა. მატერიალური მტკიცებულებებიც, კერძოდ კი, არქეოლოგია, მოწმობს იმ შესანიშნავ გზას, თუ როგორ აღბეჭდეს სომხებმა და ქართველებმა თავიანთი არქიტექტურისა და კულტურის თანდათან მზარდი ინდივიდუალობა მიმდებარე ლანდშაფტზე, როგორც ფიზიკური, ასევე წერილობითი ფორმით. ვინაიდან ლიტერატურული კვლევებისა და არქეოლოგიის სფეროში მნიშვნელოვანი წინსვლაა მიღწეული, ეს სტატია გვთავაზობს სომხურ-ქართული პალიმფსესტების პირველ მიმოხილვას.