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- 9 *Ingela Nilsson*
The Literary Voice of a Chronicler:
The *Synopsis Chronike* of Constantine
Manasses
- 41 *Sandro Nikolaishvili*
Georgian Manuscript Production and Tran-
slation Activities in the Christian East and
Byzantine Empire
- 81 *Charis Messis and Ingela Nilsson*
L'ixeutique à Byzance: pratique et
représentation littéraire
- 109 *Maria Kalinowska*
I asked him about the secret he knew...
(Juliusz Słowacki) Konstantinos Kanaris and
his Fights in Polish Romantic Poetry
- 129 *Lambros Baltiotis*
Conversions of Muslims during the Greek
War of Independence: transitions from a
Greek-Orthodox nation to a civic nation
- 167 Book Reviews

Georgian Manuscript Production and Translation Activities in the Christian East and Byzantine Empire

Sandro Nikolaishvili

The conversion to Christianity of three Caucasian states on the eastern fringes of the Roman Empire, Armenia, Kartli/Iberia, and Albania, was a turning point in the history of the Late Antique Caucasus.¹ In the 320s, King of Kartli Mirian III and his wife Nana became Christians as a consequence of apostolic activities of a Roman woman, named Nino.² According to the Georgian tradition, supported by Greek and Latin sources, King Mirian III wrote a letter to Emperor Constantine, informing him of his conversion and asking him to send high-ranking ecclesiastics to his kingdom.³

Accounts of correspondence between Mirian and Constantine notwithstanding, the evidence is thin that the emperor was involved in the conversion of the royal house of Kartli. Christianity came to Kartli from Syria and Jerusalem and Cappadocia rather than from the core of the Roman Empire. Archeological materials show that Christianization in Kartli had advanced long before the royal conversion. Christian burials and symbols related to Christianity that date to the third century have been found throughout Kartli.⁴

¹ The article is written within the frame of the research programme *Retracing Connections* (<https://retracingconnections.org/>) financed by Riksbankens Jubileumsfond (M19–0430:1).

² *Conversion of Kartli* (ed. Abuladze), 85–86.

³ *Ibid.*, 85.

⁴ Braund 1994, 239.

The gradual advance of Christianity brought considerable change in the social and cultural life of Kartli. The invention of an original Georgian script in order to serve the divine liturgy in Georgian was among significant innovations caused by the Christianization.⁵ Georgian was not a written language prior to the adoption of Christianity, and the creation of the original script enhanced the development of the Georgian literary and book culture. Thus, Christianity gave a strong impetus to the translation activities and manuscript production, which proliferated in the monasteries of Jerusalem and the Palestinian desert in the fifth and the sixth centuries.

Georgian Monks in the Holy Land

Christianity and the popularization of monasticism brought a significant number of Georgians to Palestine and Jerusalem, places associated with Christ's life and passion. By the beginning of the fifth century, Georgian monasticism thrived in the Holy Land due to the activities of Peter the Iberian (Georgian).⁶ Peter was a member of Georgian royal house, and he spent his childhood at the imperial court of Emperor Theodosius II (r. 408–450) after his father sent him to Constantinople as a hostage. The young Georgian prince enjoyed certain privileges at the emperor's court; Empress Eudokia became Peter's patron, and he received a good education. In the long run, Peter's royal lineage and connections with the imperial court helped him to establish monasteries in the Holy Land and beyond.

After he arrived in Jerusalem, Peter, with his supporters, erected a hospice exclusively for Georgian pilgrims. Later, he founded the first Georgian monastery in the desert, not far from the Jordan River, and a second monastery in Jerusalem (in 428) in the area of Mount Zion, near the Tower of David.⁷ The latter came to be called the "monastery of the Iberians" and was known for its charitable activities.⁸

⁵ Signes Codoñer 2014, 131–138.

⁶ Horn 2006, 93.

⁷ Patrich 1995, 5.

⁸ Horn 2006, 71; Patrich 1995, 5.

The monasteries established by Peter and his supporters in the Holy Land were active in the sixth century. *De Aedificiis* of Procopius of Caesarea testifies that Emperor Justinian I (r. 527–565) restored two Georgian monasteries, one in the desert of Jordan and the other in Jerusalem.⁹

In the 1950s, archeologist, V. Corbo and his team unearthed the remnants of the Georgian monastery and four mosaic Georgian inscriptions at Beir-el-Qutt (between Jerusalem and the desert of Jordan). The inscriptions in *asomtavruli script* were incorporated into the floors of the main Church and refectory.¹⁰ For a long time, it was firmly believed that V. Corbo found the monastery established by Peter the Iberian and consequently the Georgian inscriptions were dated to the fifth century.¹¹ However, based on the comprehensive analysis of epigraphic, numismatic and ceramic finds, the scholars concluded that the monastery at Beir el-Qutt was founded between 532 and 552 and thus cannot be connected with Peter the Iberian.¹² From the Georgian inscriptions one learns that the monastery was dedicated to St. Theodorus of Tyron and was built by Abba Antonius.¹³

Georgian monastic communities multiplied in Palestine as new monasteries were established in the vicinity of Jerusalem. Soon after the foundation of the Lavra of Mar Saba in the Judean desert, Georgian monks settled in the Lavra. Mar Saba became the most important Georgian literary center in Late Antiquity. Georgian monks developed a particularly strong attachment to it through the centuries.¹⁴ By the sixth century, Georgian monks had succeeded in building their church in Mar Saba and served the liturgy in Georgian.¹⁵

During the Byzantine-Sassanid wars, the Persians sacked the Lavra of Mar Saba in 614. A century later, in 796, the Arabs attacked and

⁹ *Georgika* II (ed. Qauxchishvili), 223.

¹⁰ Ameling 2018, 605.

¹¹ Braund 1994, 285.

¹² Ameling 2018, 605.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 607.

¹⁴ Mgaloblishvili 2001, 229–230.

¹⁵ Menabde 1980, 26.

ransacked the monastery a second time. Despite these calamities and a changing political and religious landscape caused by the consolidation of Arab power in the Christian East, Georgian monks remained at Mar Saba.¹⁶

Mar Saba is one of the earliest attested centers of Georgian manuscript production in the Christian East and the place associated with the creation of the earliest Georgian liturgical-homiletic collection, *mravaltavi* (polykephala). In 864, a team of Sabaites monks finished working on the first dated Georgian *mravaltavi* manuscript. The manuscript has a long colophon in which the Georgian monks who worked on *mravaltavi* reveal their names.

I, Makari of Mleta, son of Giorgi the Tall, was granted a privilege by the Lord to create this holy book of *mravaltavi* with the assistance of our spiritual brother Pimen of Kaxeti and my nephew Amona [...] this book was written in the city of Jerusalem, in the Lavra of our holy father and great saint Saba, when God-loving Theodosius was Patriarch and virtuous and pious Solomon the *hegoumenos* of Saint Saba [...] And I, poor Makari, donated this *mravaltavi* to the holiest Mountain of Sinai [...].¹⁷

Makari's colophon attests that Georgians not only lived in Mar Saba around the 860s, but copied and worked on manuscripts. Makari clearly states that the *mravaltavi* manuscript was created for Mount Sinai. Based on the colophon testimony, it seems that in the ninth century particularly close ties were forged between the Georgian monks of Mar Saba and Mount Sinai and they cooperated and exchanged manuscripts.

¹⁶ Ibid., 27.

¹⁷ *Mravaltavi of Sinai* (ed. Shanidze), 280-281: .მე, მაკარი ლეთეთელი, ძჳ გიორგი გრძელისად, ცოდვილი ფრიად, ღირს მყო ღმერთმან შესაქმედ წმიდისა ამის წიგნისა მრავალთავისა თანა-შეწევნითა მძისა ჩუენისა სულიერად პიმენ კახისადთა და ჳელთ-წერთა დედის მძისწულისა ჩემისა ამონა (...) დაიწერა ესე წიგნი იერუსალემს, ლავრასა დიდსა წმიდისა და ნეტარისა მამისა ჩუენისა საბადასა დღეთა ღმრთის მოყუარისა თევდოსი პატრეაქისათა და საბა-წმიდას პატოისნისა და სანატრელისა სოლომონ მამასახლისისა (...) და მე, გლახაკმან მაკარი, შევწირე წმიდაი ესე მრავალთავი წმიდათ-წმიდას მთას სინას...

The Georgian monks' attachment to the Lavra of Mar Saba is attested in the *Life of Ilarion Kartveli* (Georgian), a hagiographical text that portrays ninth-century events. According to the narrative, Ilarion, during a pilgrimage to the holy places of the Christian East, visited the Lavra of Saba and stayed there for seven years.¹⁸

Georgian monks in Mar Saba carried on with literary activities in the tenth century. At the very beginning of the century, Giorgi Tbileli created a manuscript (*Sin. Geo.* 97), containing Ephrem the Syrian's works in Georgian translation, which ended up on Mount Sinai.¹⁹ It is not entirely clear, however, whether Giorgi Tbileli created the manuscript at the request of his Georgian peers from Sinai or whether it arrived on Mount Sinai sometime afterward.

In 925, an anonymous Sabaite Georgian monk finished a manuscript, *Sin. Geo.* 36, containing John Chrysostom's and John Moschos' works. The colophon names a certain Timothy, who helped with the translation, and also commemorates Leon, the patriarch of Jerusalem, and Timothy, a *hegoumenos* of Mar Saba.²⁰

Ioane-Zosime, a renowned tenth-century Georgian monk, scribe, and editor, started his career at Mar Saba. Mainly interested in liturgical and hymnographical texts, Ioane-Zosime compiled a large body of works between 949 and 987.²¹ In 973, Ioane-Zosime left Mar Saba and took shelter on Mount Sinai, where he continued to work on manuscripts. Only a few works with Ioane-Zosime's autograph from his time at Mar Saba survive; among them is *Iadgari (tropologion)*, an anthology of liturgical hymns.²²

Another piece of evidence corroborates that Mar Saba enjoyed huge authority among Georgian monks. In the ninth century, Grigol Xanzteli, a leader of the monastic movement in Tao-Klarjeti, adopted the Sabaite typicon for the monasteries that he established. According to his vita, Grigol asked another monk, who was traveling to Jerusalem, to acquire

¹⁸ *Life of Ilarion Kartveli* (ed. Abuladze), 13–14.

¹⁹ Цагарели 1888, 231.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 233–234.

²¹ Kekelidze 1980, 164–170; Rayfield 2013, 32.

²² Kekelidze 1980, 168–169.

and translate the Sabaite typicon. When Grigol received the translated typicon, he had several copies made and sent them to the monasteries under his supervision.²³

The Lavra of St. Chariton (Palavra) was another monastery in the Holy Land where Georgian monks settled in Late Antiquity. Despite incomplete information, a few surviving manuscripts record Georgian monks' literary activities. Particularly noteworthy among Georgian manuscripts that originated from Palavra is a collection of hagiographical texts – *Sin. Geo.* 11.²⁴ The manuscript dates to the tenth century, but it seems that several hagiographies in the manuscript had been translated in the eighth and the ninth centuries. It is not entirely clear if all the hagiographies in *Sin. Geo.* 11 were translated at Palavra or in other monasteries in the Holy Land. For instance, a note inserted at the end of the *Life of Athanasios* claims that the text was translated in Jerusalem by Saith and copied by Paul at the Lavra of Chariton.²⁵ As noted above, Georgian monastic communities in the Holy Land were connected with each other. Therefore, it is plausible that some of the hagiographies preserved in the manuscript *Sin. Geo.* 11 were translated elsewhere and monks of Palavra acquired these texts with the help of their Georgian peers who lived in other monasteries of the Holy Land.

Cooperation among Georgian monks in the Christian East is further exemplified by the colophon in the tenth-century manuscript. The colophon author, Symeon the Melodist, a monk from Mar Saba, says that he created the manuscript at the request of Theodore, a Georgian monk from the Lavra of Chariton.²⁶ Interestingly, this manuscript, which was made at Mar Saba for the Chariton Lavra, ended up on Mount Sinai.²⁷

²³ Giorgi Merçule, *the Life of Grigol Xanzteli* (ed. Abuladze), 264–265.

²⁴ Цагарели 1888, 216–217.

²⁵ Javakhishvili 1947, 28.

²⁶ Цагарели 1888, 225.

²⁷ Javakhishvili 1947, 107–109.

At the Periphery of the Christian East: Georgian monastic communities on Mount Sinai

Georgian monks seem to have reached Mount Sinai in the sixth century, but due to scarce evidence it is not easy to trace their activities for at least two centuries.²⁸ Nonetheless, twelve Georgian inscriptions carved on rocks near the Monastery of St. Catherine establish that Georgian pilgrims visited Sinai between the seventh and the ninth centuries.²⁹

Georgian monks' presence on Sinai from the ninth century is somewhat better documented.³⁰ The primary sources that provide information about the Georgian monks' activities come mainly from manuscript colophons and commentaries written by the scribes. In the ninth century, monks from the Holy Land who had suffered from the increased Arab hostilities started to migrate to Mount Sinai. Georgian monks, like their peers, began to abandon Palestine for Sinai. Located towards the periphery of the Islamic core, Sinai was relatively well-defended from the intrusions of Arab militants.

In 973, Ioane-Zosime, hymnographer and scribe, escaped from Mar Saba with other Georgian monks and moved to Sinai. The Georgian monks carried manuscripts to continue literary activities on Sinai. At the monastery of St. Catherine, Ioane-Zosime created an important and unique work, *Synaxarion for the Months of the Year*, which unites the liturgical calendars of Constantinople, Mar Saba, and Jerusalem. This calendar contains rare information about monasticism, ecclesiastical organization, and liturgical practices of the Holy Land and Lavra of Mar Saba.³¹ Ioane-Zosime was also famed as a hymnographer; he composed an original Georgian hymn: *Praise and Glorification of the Georgian Language*. This mystical hymn, imbued with numerological symbolism and scriptural references, elaborated the idea that humankind would be judged in Georgian during the second coming.³²

²⁸ Meskhi 2013, 14.

²⁹ Ibid., 14.

³⁰ Menabde 1980, 45.

³¹ Menabde 1980, 36; Kekelidze 1980, 167.

³² Kekelidze 1980, 167; Rayfield 2013, 32–33.

By the tenth century, Georgian monks on Sinai had succeeded in founding a church dedicated to John the Apostle and a scriptorium, empowering them to translate texts and produce Georgian manuscripts.³³ Sources also attest to the existence of a Georgian library with a catalog listing the Georgian manuscripts.³⁴ An anonymous Georgian scribe tells interesting details about the Sinai library in his colophon. He relates that the library had a special room where a person could sit and use a manuscript, but it was not allowed to take it out and to read in a monastic cell.³⁵

In the eleventh century, a team of learned Georgian monks was active on Sinai. Around 1074, a Georgian scribe, Michael, copied the Gospels (*Sin. Geo.* 19); he inserted two prayers in the manuscript that mention his peer Georgian scribes and copyists – Davit, Moses, Michael, and Simeon.³⁶ Giorgi Iceli was another eleventh-century learned Georgian monk from Sinai; the only information about him comes from his colophon at the end of the manuscript that he donated to the Sinai library.³⁷

The manuscript colophons and commentaries do not convey any information about the relationship between the Georgian royal court and monastic communities of Sinai. The extent to which Georgian monks enjoyed the patronage of Georgian kings is challenging to ascertain before the reign of Davit IV (r. 1089–1125). In the first years of the twelfth century, King Davit IV founded another Georgian church on Sinai. According to his biographer, the king took good care of the church and provided it with money and books: “for on the mountain of Sinai, where Moses and Elias saw God, he built a monastery, and granted it many thousands of gold coins, loads of curtains, a complete set of ecclesiastic books, and holy vessels of refined gold.”³⁸

³³ Menabde 1980, 46; Meskhi 2013, 29.

³⁴ Menabde 1980, 58; Meskhi 2013, 67–68.

³⁵ Цагарели 1888, 218; Javakhishvili 1947, 124.

³⁶ Javakhishvili 1947, 42.

³⁷ Цагарели 1888, 229.

³⁸ *The Life of Davit* (ed. Šanidze), 208; Thomson 1996, 344: რამეთუ მთასა სინასა, სადა იხილეს ღმერთი მოსე და ელია, აღაშენა მონასტერი და წარსცა ოქროი მრავალათასეული და მოსაკიდელნი ოქსინონი და წიგნები საეკლესიოი სრულებით და სამსახურებელი სიწმიდეთაი ოქროისა რჩეულისაი. About

Sinai was undoubtedly one of the centers of Georgian manuscript production and translating activities throughout the centuries. In 1888, the Georgian historian and orientalist, A. Cagareli, visited Sinai and discovered ninety-three extant Georgian manuscripts.³⁹

From Jerusalem to ‘New Jerusalem’: Relocation of Georgian monastic communities from the Holy Land to the Byzantine Empire

The Arab advance and the rise of Islam were a great challenge for the Eastern Christian world. Within decades after Prophet Mohammad’s death, the Byzantine Empire’s eastern provinces fell under Arab control. In the 650s, when Moawia was campaigning in the depths of Asia Minor and targeting Constantinople, the Arab general, Habib ibn Maslama forced Stephanos, ruler of Kartli/Iberia, into submission. Stephanos held the high-ranking Byzantine court dignity of *patrikios*, but he had to recognize the caliph’s supremacy and agree to pay an annual tribute. According to the agreement reached between Stephanos and Maslama, the Christian faith in Kartli/Iberia would not be persecuted, but local Christians were free to convert to Islam if they wished to do so.⁴⁰ Arab rule may not have been harsh in Kartli/Iberia in the first decades of the conquest, but things started to change after the caliphate recovered from the first round of a civil war. To secure its position in the Caucasus and disable the imperial court of Byzantium to forge a political/military alliance with local Christian rulers, the caliphs started to send Arab military and civil officials to Kartli.

The decline of the Georgian princely house must have had a negative impact on the Georgian monastic communities of the Christian East; the rulers of Kartli probably became unable to patronize and support the Georgian monks. Furthermore, a new taxation system imposed by the Arabs on the conquered territories became a heavy burden for the

the Georgian church on Sinai built by the support of King Davit IV see: Meskhi 2013, 44–46.

³⁹ Цагарели 1888; Aleksidze, 2005.

⁴⁰ Rayfield 2012, 55; Lomouri, 2011, 235–236.

Georgian monastic communities of the Holy Land, Sinai, and the Black Mountain.

While the Georgian monastic communities declined in the Arab-controlled regions, Byzantium's core areas, such as Constantinople, Mount Olympus, and later Mount Athos, started to attract Georgian monks. Throughout the centuries, the Byzantine emperors took good care to enrich Constantinople with sacred objects and saints' relics and to found monasteries and churches to make the imperial capital the holiest city in Christendom.⁴¹ The image of Constantinople as the holiest city was also cultivated among the Georgian monks and ecclesiastics. The Georgian accounts composed in the ninth and subsequent centuries referred to Constantinople as a "vessel of Christ," the "Second Jerusalem," and a "Holy City."

Mount Olympus in Bithynia was one of the first core regions of Byzantium that attracted Georgian monks as early as the ninth century. Due to the limited evidence, however, it is difficult to reconstruct much of the history of Georgian monasticism on Olympus. Despite some claims that Georgian monks managed to establish a monastery on Olympus, there is no evidence to support this claim.⁴²

Two hagiographic narratives, the *Life of Ilarion Kartveli* (9th century) and the *Life of Ioane and Euthymios the Athonites* (11th century), are accounts that attest the presence of Georgian monks on the mountain between the ninth and the tenth centuries but provide little information about the activities and scale of the Georgian monastic communities. The *Life of Ilarion* relates only that Georgian monks were present on Olympus when Ilarion and his disciples arrived on the mountain. According to the hagiography, Ilarion left Georgia for Mount Olympus during the reign of Emperor Michael III (r. 840–867).⁴³

Ioane and Euthymios the Athonites, a father and son who founded the Iviron monastery on Athos, started their monastic life on Mount Olympus. According to the *Life of Ioane and Euthymios*, after years of living on Olympus, Ioane's "fame had spread, and the Greeks, as well

⁴¹ Mergiali-Sahas 2001, 42–60.

⁴² Menabde 1980, 181.

⁴³ *Life of Ilarion Kartveli* (ed. Abuladze), 20.

as Georgians, showed him honor.”⁴⁴ If this statement made by the author of the hagiography is true, Georgians were well represented on Mount Olympus by the 970s.

Three extant Georgian manuscripts from Mount Olympus attest that Georgian monks translated texts and were engaged in literary activities. The colophon of the earliest surviving Georgian manuscript from Olympus tells the following story:

I poor Michael [...] the least chosen among the priests, translated the Acts of Paul by order of my tutor Giorgi and with the help of Ioane [...] this was written on the holy mountain of Ulumbo, at the place of saint Kosmas and Damiane in the time when Polyeuctus was patriarch in Constantinople and during the kingship of Nikephore.⁴⁵

As colophon relates, during the reign of Emperor Nikephoros II Phokas (r. 963–969) a team of Georgian monks, supervised by a certain Giorgi, completed the translation of the Acts of Paul from Greek into Georgian.

In the second half of the ninth century, disciples of Ilarion Kartveli, with support from Emperor Basileios I (r. 867–886), founded the monastery of Romana on the outskirts of Constantinople.⁴⁶ Romana was the first Georgian monastery in the core of the Byzantine Empire. The *Life of Ilarion Kartveli* is the primary source that preserves invaluable information about the circumstances which allowed the Georgian monks to build the monastery. According to the narrative, Emperor Basileios offered to the Georgian monks to have their monastery. When the monks chose the place on the outskirts of Constantinople, the emperor ordered the construction of Romana. The hagiography relates that under

⁴⁴ Giorgi the Athonite, *the Life of Ioane and Euthymios* (ed. Abuladze), 44; Grdzeldidze 2009, 56.

⁴⁵ *The Chronicles* (ed. Zhordania), 171: მე მიქაელ გლახკმან (...) მოვიგე წმ. ესე პავლე განზრახვითა მოძღურისა ჩემისა გიორგისითა და შეწეწნითა იოვანე კახისადათა. დაიწერა წმ. მთასა ოლინპოდსასა საყოფელსა წისა კოზმან და დამიანეთასა, პატრიარქობასა კონსტანტინოპოლეს პოლიოვკტოდასა, და მეფობასა ნიკიფორესსა.

⁴⁶ *Life of Ilarion Kartveli* (ed. Abuladze), 32–33.

Basileios' supervision the monastery was completed in a matter of months and the emperor donated valuable gifts and books.⁴⁷

The monks of Romana, like their peers from Mount Olympus, were involved in literary activities. Only two manuscripts originating from Romana have come down to us. The earliest extant manuscript (A-134), dating to ca. 1066, was created under the supervision of Simeon Dvali and contains *The Climax* by John Climacus and two hagiographies.⁴⁸ The second manuscript (A-1335), the unique and richly illuminated Vani Gospels, was commissioned by Queen Tamar (r. 1084–1212) before the end of the twelfth century. Two Georgian monks from Romana are known to have worked on Vani Gospels: Ioane “Unworthy” and Michael, an illuminator of the manuscript.⁴⁹

The Monastery of Iviron on Mount Athos

Even though Georgian monastic communities multiplied and grew strong in the core of Byzantium, the foundation of the Georgian monastery of Iviron on Mount Athos was of great significance. Soon after its foundation, Iviron became a significant center of translation activities and manuscript production. One of the primary goals of the Iviron monks was to disseminate translated texts and manuscripts to Georgia to provide the local churches and monasteries with Christian texts that were not available in Georgian translation.⁵⁰

Ioane the Athonite, an aristocrat from Tao, was the first *hegoumenos* of Iviron, responsible for turning Iviron into a vital center of Georgian literary activities in the Byzantine Empire. Before taking monastic vows Ioane had been a close associate of Davit III *kouropalatēs*. As his biographer relates, Ioane was concerned that there were not enough books and manuscripts in Georgia. To supply the Georgian churches and monasteries with the required literature, Ioane encouraged his son, Euthymios to dedicate himself to translation activities.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Metreveli 1976, 151–154.

⁴⁹ Kekelidze 1954, 407–410.

⁵⁰ Metreveli 2012, 259–267.

‘My son the land of Kartli is in a great need of books for they lack many of them. I see what God has granted to you so make sure that with your efforts you multiply your gifts from God.’ Because Euthymios was obedient by nature, he at once followed his instruction and started translating, and everyone was amazed because such translations [...] have neither been made in our language nor, I think, will be made.⁵¹

Without a doubt, Ioane and Euthymios facilitated the reception of Byzantine/Christian thought in the Georgian-speaking environment. Ioane the Athonite’s attempts to improve the cultural landscape of Georgia are attested in his preface to a manuscript of John Chrysostom’s commentaries on the Gospel of Mathew. Ioane relates:

This work was not available before in our Georgian language [...] whereas churches in Rome and Greece had multiple copies. Our land, unfortunately, not only did not possess this book, but many other books, too. Therefore, I, poor Ioane, the least chosen of all monks, was sad because of this matter and because the land of Kartli was so poor when it comes to books. I worked very hard, made a considerable effort, educated my son Euthymios in all-encompassing Greek learning, and directed him to translate books from Greek into Georgian.⁵²

⁵¹ Giorgi the Athonite, *The Life of Ioane and Euthymios* (ed. Abuladze), 61; Grdzelidze 2009, 67: ეტყვიან მამაი იოვანე ვითარმედ “შვილო ჩემო, ქართლისა ქუეყანაი დიდან ნაკლულევან არს წიგნთაგან და მრავალნი წიგნნი აკლან, და ვხედავ, რომელ ღმერთსა მოუმადლებია შენდა. აწ იღუაწე, რაითა, განამრავლო სასყიდელი შენი ღმრთისაგან.” და იგი, ვითარცა იყო ყოველსავე ზედა მორჩილი, მოსწრაფედ შეუდგა ბრძანებასა მისსა და იწყო თარგმნად და ყოველნივე განაკვრენა, რამეთუ ეგევითარი თარგმანი, გარეშე მათ პირველთასა, არღარა გამოჩინებულ არს ენასა ჩუენსა და ვჰგონებ, თუ არცაღა გამოჩინებად არს.

⁵² *The Chronicles* (ed. Zhordania), 140–141: ხოლო ენასა ამას ჩნსა ქართულსა. არავინ სადა პოვნოილ იყო აქამომდე: რათამცა გამოეხუნეს წნი ესე წიგნი თარგმანებანი წსა სახარებისანი: ად საბერძნეთისა ელსე ეკლესიანი და ჰრომისანი სავსე იყვნეს ამათგან: ხ ჩნისა მას ქყანისანი ნაკლულევან: და არა ესოდენ წიგნნი აკლდეს. ენასა ჩნსა (...) ამისთვის მე გლახაკი ესე და ნარჩევი ყლთა მონაზონთა: იოანე მწუხარე ვიყავ ამის საქმისათვის: რლ ესრეთ ნაკლულევან იყო ქყნად ვაჩუენე და შვილი ჩემი ეფთვიძე გავსწავლე: სწავლითა ბერძნულითა სრულიად. და გამოთარგმანებად წარვჰმართე წიგნთა: ბერძულისაგან ქართულად.

The foundation of Iviron was closely linked with the turbulent events in the Byzantine Empire in the 970s. When Bardas Skleros rebelled and challenged Basileios II and Konstantinos VIII, Davit III *kouropalatēs*, ruler of Tao, sent military aid to support the emperors. The joint Byzantine and Georgian army defeated Bardas Skleros in 979 and neutralized the threat. In reward for the military support, the imperial court lavishly remunerated Ioane-Tornike, the Georgian army commander, and an aristocrat from the Čordvaneli family.⁵³ Ioane-Tornike had held the positions of *patrikios* and *synkellos* in the Byzantine administration, but he was a monk on Athos when the imperial court asked him to travel to Tao to persuade Davit *kouropalatēs* to support the government in Constantinople. Ioane-Tornike not only met the request of the imperial court and traveled to Tao, but he also agreed to command the Georgian expeditionary army against Skleros even though he was no longer a layman. The imperial court appreciated the Athonite monk's sacrifice. After the defeat of the main adversary of the empire, Ioane-Tornike received a vast amount of wealth and spoils of war.

After Tornike had routed Skleros and returned [to Athos] with innumerable goods and wealth because the treasure alone exceeded 12 *kentenaria* together with some other fine things, he gave everything to his spiritual father Ioane, and denied himself completely, not keeping even smallest thing in his possession.⁵⁴

Before Bardas Skleros' rebellion, Georgians had made at least two attempts to build a monastery on Athos, but emperors Ioannes Tzimiskes

⁵³ Giorgi the Athonite, *The Life of Ioane and Euthymios* (ed. Abuladze), 50; Grdzelidze 2009, 60.

⁵⁴ Ibid: ხოლო თორნიკ, ვინაითგან იოტა სკლიაროსი და კუალად აქავე მოიქცა ურიცხვთა საფასითა და განძითა, - რამეთუ უფროს ათორმეტისა კენდინარისა მოილო განძი ოდენ, სხუათა ტურფათაგან კიდე, - რომელი-იგი ყოველივე მამისა თვისისა სულიერისა იოვანეს ხელთა მისცა და თავი თვისი სრულად უარ-ყო და არაცა თუ მცირედი რაიმე დაუტევა ხელმწიფებასა ქუეშე თვისსა.

in 972 and Basileios II in 976 refused to grant them permission.⁵⁵ Hence, had not Davit III *kouropalatēs* supported the Byzantine emperors during the crisis of the 970s, Iviron might never have been established on Athos. After the victory over Skleros and his supporters, Emperor Basileios II granted Georgian monks permission to acquire land on Athos to build the monastery; in addition, the emperor donated lands and monasteries in the different parts of the empire to the Iviron.⁵⁶

Iviron attracted Georgian ecclesiastics from all over Byzantium and Georgia. Ioane-Tornike, *ktetor* and the founder of Iviron, enlarged the community of the newly founded monastery by bringing Georgian monks and orphans from Tao-Klarjeti. As the first *hegoumenos* of Iviron, Ioane the Athonite did his best to invite prominent churchmen to the monastery. He was successful in persuading Ioane Grzelize and Arsen Ninoc‘mindeli to leave the desert of Ponto and move to Athos. As it happened, these two monks were scribes and learned men, and Ioane thought to use their skills to turn Iviron into a center of manuscript production. In a manuscript colophon Ioane Grzelize and Arsen Ninoc‘mindeli claim: “By order of God [...] we poor sinners Arsen Ninoc‘mindeli and Ioane Grzelize and Chrysostom copied holy books translated from Greek to Georgian by our holy illuminator father, Euthymios.”⁵⁷

The translation movement initiated and supervised by Ioane the Athonite was carried on by his successor and son, Euthymios, who became the second *hegoumenos* of the monastery. Under Euthymios’ leadership, intellectual life thrived at Iviron, and the monastery became the primary hub of manuscript production from where translated Byzantine/Christian texts were widely disseminated in Georgia. The revival of Georgian literature in the eleventh and twelfth centuries was enhanced by the reception of the intellectual legacy of the Iviron monastic school.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Speake 2018, 56.

⁵⁶ Grdzeliidze 2009, 29.

⁵⁷ Pantsulaia 1954, 76–84.

⁵⁸ Kekelidze 1945, 218; Metreveli 2012, 260.

Unlike his father, Ioane, Euthymios was educated in Constantinople and had an excellent knowledge of Greek. A member of an aristocratic family, he was a boy when he and other aristocratic children were sent to Constantinople after Emperor Basileios II requested hostages from Davit III *kouropalatēs*. Byzantine emperors often asked for hostages from Georgian rulers to guarantee and secure their loyalty and obedience to the imperial court. It is not an exaggeration to state that the education Euthymios received at the Byzantine imperial court turned him into an intellectual and prolific translator. Moreover, he can be considered a shining example of a cultural agent/broker who enhanced the cultural ties between Byzantium and Georgia through his intellectual activities. Narrative accounts confirm that at Davit III *kouropalatēs*' request, Euthymios and his team translated manuscripts and sent them to the ruler of Tao:

Many of these books were sent to David *kouropalatēs*, who was faithful and therefore rejoiced and praised God, saying: 'Thanks be to God who in our times revealed a new Chrysostom.'

And the king sent letter after letter with a plea to translate more books and to send them back to the East. And the beloved one translated without a break; he did not allow himself to rest but worked day and night like a bee on the sweet honey of divine books and through them our language and Church were sweetened. He translated so many books that it is hardly possible to count them [...]⁵⁹

⁵⁹ Giorgi the Athonite, *The Life of Ioane and Euthymios* (ed. Abuladze), 61–62; Grdzeldze 2009, 67–68: და მრავალნი წიგნნი წაესცნის წინაშე დავით პურაპალატისა, რომელნი-იგი იხილნა რაი, ვითარცა იყო მორწმუნე, სიახარულითა აღივსო, და ადიდებდა ღმრთსა და იტყოდა, ვითარმედ: 'მაღლი ღმერთსა, რომელმან ჩუენთა ამათ ჟამთა ახალი ოქროპირი გამოაჩინა.' და ზედაის-ზედა მოუწერნ, რაითა თარგმნიდეს და წარსცემდეს. და იგი სანატრელი შეუსუნებელად თარგმნინ და რაითურთით არა სცემდა განსუენებასა თავსა თვსსა, არამედ დღე და ღამე ტკბილსა მას თაფლსა წიგნთა საღმრთოთასა შურებოდა, რომლისა მიერ დაატკბო ენაი ჩუენი და ეკლესიაი. რამეთუ თარგმნნა წიგნნი საღმრთონი რომელთა აღრიცხუვაი კნინდა-და შეუძლებელ არს.

In 1019 Euthymios renounced his position as *hegoumenos* of the Iviron monastery to dedicate himself fully to literary activities. He spent the rest of his life in his monastic cell, translating texts and working on manuscripts.⁶⁰

After his death, Euthymios became known as a “new Chrysostom,” enlightener of the Georgian church and a model of a learned monk and translator. The impressive number of Byzantine/Christian texts that Euthymios translated into Georgian was the main reason that he earned such fame and authority among Georgian ecclesiastics. Giorgi Mc‘ire (Minor), a learned monk from the Iviron, paid tribute to Euthymios and lauded him as a “luminous star,” “jewel of the nation,” and a “new Chrysostom.”

Like a thirteenth apostle he cleansed our country completely from the deficiency mentioned above through his numerous translations of Holy Scripture [...] And he also left us accounts of the rulers and canons of the Church, the bulwark of our faith. He left these copies which from this holy mountain and God-built Lavra reached our land and spread on our nation like the living springs of the heavenly river.⁶¹

Euthymios authored at least 160 translations that encompass all genres of ecclesiastical literature: biblical, exegetical, apocryphal, homiletic, canonical, dogmatic-polemical, and liturgical texts.⁶² He also translated other authors and types of literature – Gregory the Theologian,

⁶⁰ Kekelidze 1980, 187.

⁶¹ Giorgi Mc‘ire, *The Life of Giorgi the Athonite* (ed. Abuladze), 111; Grdzeldze 2009, 124: და ვითარცა მეათცამეტემან მოციქულმან ქუეყანაი ჩუენი ამათ ზემოხსენებულთა ღუარძლთაგან სრულიად გაწმინდა მრავლად თარგმანებითა წმიდათა წერილთათაი, ვითარცა დასაბამსავე სიტყვსა ჩუენისასა ვთქუეათ, და წესნი და კანონნი ეკლესიისანი დამამტკიცებელნი სარწმუნოებისა ჩუენისანი. ესე ყოველნი აღწერილად დაგვტევნა, რომელნი-იგი წმიდისა ამის მთისაგან და ღმრთივ-აღმუნებულისა ლავრისა ვითარცა მდინარისაგან ედემეანისა ნაკადულნი ცხოვრებისანი პირსა ზედა ქუეყანისა და ნათესავისა ჩუენისასა მიევიწინეს.

⁶² For a list of Euthymios’ translations, see Kekelidze 1980, 194–213; Giorgi the Athonite, *The Life of Ioane and Euthymios* (ed. Abuladze), 62–64; Grdzeldze 2009, 68–71.

Maximus the Confessor, John of Damascus – which had not been available before in Georgian. For instance, before Euthymios translated the corpus of Gregory the Theologian’s works, the Cappadocian father was represented in Georgian by only his two homilies (“On Epiphany” and “On Theology”).⁶³ By introducing the Georgian audience to revered theologians and church fathers, Euthymios further enhanced the cultural orientation of the Georgian Church towards Constantinople. His translations and literary activities served to develop a Georgian literary language and bring it close to Byzantine standards.⁶⁴

Another significant factor that enhanced the “Byzantinization” of Georgian religious culture was Euthymios’s translation of Byzantine liturgical literature. Before the tenth century, the Georgian church followed the Jerusalem liturgical practice, but when Euthymios translated the *Synaxarion* of Constantinople, that was widely disseminated in the Georgian-speaking environment, the Georgian church gradually adopted the Constantinopolitan rite.⁶⁵ Among Euthymios’ translations, the *Life of the Virgin Mary* is particularly valuable. The narrative is the earliest extant biography of Theotokos, the authorship of which Euthymios ascribes to a prominent Byzantine theologian, Maximus the Confessor. This work survives only in the Georgian translation; the Greek original narrative is lost.⁶⁶

Euthymios was also the first among the Georgians to take an interest in metaphrastic hagiographies and translate saints’ lives by Symeon Logothetes. Moreover, he adopted the metaphrastic method and applied it to *Barlaam and Ioasaph*, which he translated from Georgian into Greek. Euthymios’s *Barlaam and Ioasaph* was not just a Greek translation of the Georgian *Balavariani*, but a new text, significantly enlarged and paraphrased, containing excerpts from various other works.⁶⁷

After Euthymios’ death, the Iviron monastery had to deal with severe problems for at least two decades. The crisis started after

⁶³ Bezarashvili 2013, 100–101.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 102.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 101–102; Rayfield 2013, 26.

⁶⁶ For an English translation of the Georgian text see Shoemaker 2012, 36–156.

⁶⁷ Volk 2009, 101–15; Høgel 2019, 354–364.

Giorgi Čordvanieli, the third *hegoumenos* of Iviron, was accused of conspiracy against Emperor Romanos III (r. 1028–1034). Supposedly, Giorgi supported a group of Romanos’ opponents who had conspired to depose the emperor. As a result of the accusation against Čordvanieli, the imperial court withdrew its patronage and support, which left the monastery vulnerable. The Greek monks on Athos used the opportunity to attack and sack the Georgian monastery. During the 1040s, the Iviron gradually recovered. Georgian monks on the Black Mountain (in the environs of Antioch) were particularly concerned about the future of the Iviron and decided to send one of their peers, learned monk Giorgi on Athos.

Giorgi the Athonite started his career on the Black Mountain, earning respect and a good reputation because of his learnedness and exquisite translation skills. His supervisor, Giorgi the Recluse, sent him to Iviron with a special mission to complete the translation of the texts that Euthymios the Athonite had left unfinished. After arriving on the Holy Mountain, Giorgi the Athonite became the *hegoumenos* of Iviron. He succeeded in re-establishing the Byzantine imperial court’s support and resuscitated Georgian manuscript production at the monastery. Under Giorgi’s leadership, Iviron’s renowned school of translation recovered. Between the 1040s and 1060s, Giorgi the Athonite translated a broad spectrum of literary works into Georgian, more than 100 Greek texts. Among his works are the “Great Synaxarion” and several metaphrastic hagiographies.⁶⁸

Giorgi the Athonite was educated in Byzantium. Like Euthymios, he was sent to Constantinople as a hostage and spent more than a decade at the imperial court, where he received an up-to-date education. According to his *vita*, after Giorgi completed his studies, he was well versed in theology and rhetoric. Allegedly his erudition and in-depth knowledge of theology made an impression on Emperor Constantine X Doukas (r. 1059–1067) during polemics between the Latins and Byzantines held at the imperial palace.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Kekelidze 1980, 226–231.

⁶⁹ Giorgi Mc‘ire, *The Life of Giorgi the Athonite* (ed. Abuladze), 178–180; Grdzeliidze 2009, 144–145.

Unlike Euthymios the Athonite, who spent most of his life on the Holy Mountain, Giorgi the Athonite often traveled around the Byzantine Empire and Christian East. He visited places either for diplomatic purposes or to acquire manuscripts and translate texts. As his vita attests, Giorgi went to Constantinople twice, and both times he tried to secure political and financial support from the imperial court. Even in the imperial capital Giorgi continued working on translations and probably used the libraries of Constantinople to acquire rare and unique manuscripts. In the 1050s, Giorgi temporarily left Mount Athos and moved to the Black Mountain, where he stayed for two or three years, spending his time working on translations. From the Black Mountain, in the 1060s, Giorgi went to Georgia at the request of King Bagrat IV (r. 1027–1072), who wanted to reform the Georgian Church with his help. The *Life of Giorgi the Athonite* claims that Giorgi brought several manuscripts with him from the Black Mountain that were copied extensively throughout the Georgian kingdom. “His books were copied in many dioceses and monasteries, and he corrected many church orders he found deficient.”⁷⁰ This example alone demonstrates how Giorgi the Athonite sought to improve the cultural and intellectual environment in his homeland. In addition, Giorgi gathered eighty orphan boys in Georgia and took them with him to Constantinople for a good education. According to his biography, when Giorgi arrived in the imperial capital, he met with Emperor Constantine X Doukas and entrusted him with the future of the orphans:

Holy king, these orphans I have collected in the east and taught them the name of God. Now I present them to your majesty. Bring them up according to your judgment and have mercy upon them so that they may pray for your soul and for the long and prosperous life of your children.⁷¹

⁷⁰ Ibid., 173; 141.

⁷¹ Giorgi Mc‘ire, *The Life of Giorgi the Athonite* (ed. Abuladze), 182; Grdzelidze 2009, 147: ‘წმიდაო მეფეო, ესე ობოლნი აღმოსავლეთს შემიკრებიან და სახელი ღმრთისაი დამისწავებია და აწ წინაშე მეფობისა თქუენისა მომიყვანებია, ვითარცა ჯერ-გიჩნს, აღზარდე და შეიწყალენ მლოცველად სულისა თქუენისა და შვილთა თქუენთა მზებგრძელობისათვს.’

An overview of Giorgi the Athonite's career and travels reveals how a learned monk in the Middle Ages could have a powerful impact on the cultural landscape of a place he visited. Giorgi arrived in Georgia with manuscripts/books that circulated widely and were copied in different parts of the kingdom. Furthermore, Giorgi continued his literary activities in Georgia for five years and tutored prince Giorgi (the future King Giorgi II).

The majority of the orphans that Giorgi took to Constantinople probably received a good education and became translators and copyists. Some may have joined the Georgian monastic communities of Byzantium, and the others may have returned to Georgia to continue literary activities. Giorgi the Athonite can safely be called a culture broker; through his translations and literary works he introduced and reinforced Byzantine traditions in the Georgian environment. He played a significant role in strengthening the links between Byzantium and Medieval Georgia.

Georgian Literary Activities on the Byzantine Periphery: The Black Mountain

The core of the Byzantine Empire, Athos, Olympus, and Constantinople was not the only place where Georgian monastic communities emerged. The Byzantine Empire's restoration of imperial control over Antioch and Northern Syria in the tenth century created favorable conditions for reviving monastic activities there. From the second quarter of the eleventh century, Georgian monks started to migrate from Tao and Klarjeti to Antioch. Georgian monastic communities and their intellectual activities flourished on the Black Mountain after the 1030s. Evidence suggests that Georgian monks arrived in the vicinity of Antioch in Late Antiquity, before the Arab conquest of the Christian East.

The earliest source that mentions Georgian monks on the Black Mountain is Theodoret of Cyrus's *Phylotion Historion*. According to the text, Symeon the Stylite had many visitors, Georgians among them.⁷²

⁷² *Georgika I* (ed. Qauxchishvili), 225.

Further information about the Georgian monks comes from the *Life of Symeon Stylite the Younger*, whose hagiography claims that one day a crowd of Georgians arrived at the monastery founded by Symeon:

A vast number of people, men, women, and children were approaching the monastery. They held crosses in their hands and were chanting and praying. When they were close to the mountain, the Holy Spirit appeared to Symeon and said: ‘I know who these people are, they are Georgians who hold your name in great esteem, and they came to you with a great faith [...] accept them in your monastery and let them be pious and God-serving.’⁷³

Another hagiographical text, *The Life of Martha*, an account of Symeon the Younger’s mother’s life, confirms that Georgian monks lived and played prominent roles in the monastery founded by Symeon. This hagiography charges Georgian monks with an extraordinary mission. According to the narrative, after Martha’s death, Symeon wholeheartedly wished to acquire parts of the True Cross and prayed to God for his wish to be fulfilled. After some time, Georgian monks arrived from Jerusalem and presented Symeon with a golden cross which held parts of the True Cross.⁷⁴ After the Arab conquest, the Georgian monastic communities dwindled in the region. There is no evidence to suggest that Georgian monks were present on the Black Mountain before the Byzantines regained control of Northern Syria during the reign of Nikephoros II Phokas (r. 963–969).

⁷³ *Life of Symeon Stylite the Younger* (ed. Kekelidze), 260: დღესა ერთსა იყო წ~დად იგი განკვრეებასა შ~ა. იხილა ერი დიდძალი ფ~დ მამათა და დედათა და ყრმათა. და აქუნდა ჳელთა მათთა ჯ~რები და მოვიდოდეს იგინი აღმოსავალით მისა ლითანიითა და ლოცვითა. რ~ლთა შესწირვიდეს ღ~თისა მიმართ. და სული წ~დადი ჰფარვიდა მათ. ყ~ლსა მას ერსა. და თანაუვიდოდა და ვ~რ მოეახლნეს იგინი მთასა მას საკვრეელსა ჰრქუა სულმან წ~მან მონასა თჯსა სჳმიონს: უწყო მეა ვინ არიან ესენი რ~ლნი მოსრულ არიან შენდა ესე არს ნათესავი ქართველთა. რ~ლნი გყუარობენ შენ სახელისა ჩემისათჳს და მოვიდოდინ შენდა ჟამითი-ჟამად სარწმუნოებითა დიდითა (...) და კ~დ დაემკვდრნენ მათგანნი მონასტერსაცა შინსა და იყვნენ იგინი მორწმუნე და კეთილად-მსახურ:.

⁷⁴ Garitte 1968, 285–286; Braund 1994, 285.

Scarce sources for the history of Georgian monasticism around Antioch in the eleventh century suggest that Georgian monks were active in more than ten monasteries of the region, including St. Symeon on Miraculous Mountain, and Mother of God of Kalipos.⁷⁵ Kalipos was the pre-eminent monastery and main hub of Georgian literary activities. Most of the extant Georgian manuscripts from the environs of Antioch were copied and composed at this monastery.⁷⁶

The re-emergence of Georgian communities on the Black Mountain contributed to the revival of translation activities. The first wave of translation is associated with Giorgi the Recluse, who lived in a cave next to the St. Symeon monastery on Miraculous Mountain. Giorgi was a hermit, but also a learned man and translator who enhanced his fellow Georgian monks' literary activities.⁷⁷ He discovered the talent of Giorgi the Athonite and supervised his translations; in one of his colophons, Giorgi the Athonite states that his work was supervised by Giorgi the Recluse. After several years, Giorgi the Athonite moved to Athos and continued his intellectual activities at the monastery of Iviron.⁷⁸

Georgian monastic communities scattered all over the Byzantine Empire were not isolated and communicated with each other, particularly Iviron on Athos and the monasteries of Black Mountain. Several examples are known of a manuscript being composed on Athos and sent to Black Mountain and vice versa. For instance, Giorgi the Recluse took good care to enlarge the Iviron monastery library and copied two texts for his peers on Athos. In the colophon of the manuscript, he relates the following: "I, poor monk Giorgi, have learned that the Holy Mountain did not have a *Life of Saint and Blessed Martha* and *Life of Saint Barlaam*; therefore, I decided to translate these works and donate them."⁷⁹ What is

⁷⁵ Djobadze 1976, 86.

⁷⁶ Djobadze 1976, 97.

⁷⁷ Menabde 1980, 152.

⁷⁸ Giorgi Mc'ire, *The Life of Giorgi the Athonite* (ed. Abuladze), 122-123; Grdzeldidze 2009, 109-110.

⁷⁹ Menabde 1980, 154: მე, გლახაკსა ბერსა გიორგი დაყუდებულსა, მასმიოდა, ვითა ესე წმიდისა და დიდებულისა ნეტარისა მართად ცხოვრებად და წმიდისა ბარლაამისი მთაწმიდას არა არსო და ამის ჯერისათჳს ვინებე აღწერად და მაგას ეკლესიასა შემოჭირვად.

noteworthy in this colophon is that Giorgi was perfectly aware of which manuscripts the Iviron library needed.

The intensity of communication and cooperation between the Iviron and the Black Mountain monks is evident from another example. Giorgi the Recluse, hermit monk from the Black Mountain who never left his monastery, ordered a Georgian monk in Iviron, Giorgi Mc'ire, to write a biography of Giorgi the Athonite. As noted above, Giorgi the Recluse was Giorgi the Athonite's teacher and supervisor, who sent the latter to Athos to continue his monastic career there. Giorgi Mc'ire was Giorgi the Athonite's student, accompanying his master on his travels around the Christian East; an eyewitness of the events described in his hagiographical account, *The Life of Giorgi the Athonite*. The evidence suggests that Giorgi Mc'ire and Giorgi the Recluse exchanged letters and agreed on the details of the biography of Giorgi the Athonite. It is evident that Giorgi Mc'ire learned a great deal from Giorgi the Recluse about the early years of his protagonist's life and monastic activities on the Black Mountain.

A high point of Georgian literary and translation activities on the Black Mountain is associated with the name of Ephrem Mc'ire [Minor]. Little is known about Ephrem's life, but it seems that he was educated in Constantinople and later moved to the Black Mountain.⁸⁰ He was active in the monasteries of St. Symeon and Kastana in the second half of the eleventh century. In 1091, Ephrem became the leader of Kastana monastery and held the position until his death. Ephrem acquired a good knowledge of Greek in Constantinople, but learned the methods of translation on the Black Mountain. His teachers were the learned Georgian monks Anton T'beli and Saba Tuxareli.⁸¹

Ephrem's literary output is impressive. He translated over 120 texts from all genres of Byzantine literature, including metaphrastic hagiographies and the works of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite.⁸² Ephrem raised translation techniques to a new level and developed

⁸⁰ Kekelidze 1980, 251–252.

⁸¹ Kekelidze 1980, 253; Bezarashvili 2015, 337.

⁸² Tvaltvdze 2010, 47–8; Bregadze 1971, 444.

philological theory to bring Georgian translated texts to perfection.⁸³ Ephrem's first rule was to translate the text into Georgian only from the original language. In his view, the translator had to follow the original text closely without adding or omitting anything. Ephrem, however, realized that a literal translation could make a Georgian text incomprehensible due to drastic differences between the Greek and Georgian languages. A translator had to be cautious and aware of this danger.⁸⁴

Ephrem supplemented translated texts with commentaries and references, explaining the original text's grammatical, textual, and historical peculiarities. In his commentaries, inserted on the manuscript margins, Ephrem clarified why he chose to translate some parts of the text in a certain way. If a passage or sentence in the Georgian translation looked confusing for a reader, Ephrem indicated that it was the same in the Greek original. Ephrem did his best to explain and interpret confusing parts.⁸⁵ When Ephrem decided to work on a particular author and text, he first inquired if it was already translated into Georgian. Then he would try to acquire a copy and check the translation. Only after meticulous inspection would Ephrem decide whether it was necessary to translate the text into Georgian again.⁸⁶

Ephrem took particular interest in studying the correlation between different redactions of the Gospels in Georgian translation. After a thorough philological scrutiny, he concluded that the oldest Georgian redactions diverged from the ones translated by Giorgi the Athonite in the eleventh century. Ephrem also compared the Georgian Gospels with the Greek originals, which revealed that Giorgi the Athonite's translation followed the original Greek Gospels more closely than the older Georgian redactions.⁸⁷

Ephrem's strong belief in his philological method encouraged him to re-translate works by Euthymios the Athonite. As already noted, after his death Euthymios was respected as an exemplary translator and

⁸³ Bezarashvili 2015, 339.

⁸⁴ Kekelidze 1980, 253–4; Khintibidze 1996, 107.

⁸⁵ Kekelidze 1980, 254; Khintibidze 1996, 108–109.

⁸⁶ Kekelidze 1980, 254.

⁸⁷ Khintibidze 1996, 116–119.

illuminator of the Georgian Church. Nevertheless, Ephrem thought that the Athonite monk was sometimes too free in his translations. Euthymios was known for his reader-oriented method; he abridged or expanded some parts of the original text in the Georgian translation to make a text more comprehensible for a broad audience.⁸⁸ Furthermore, Euthymios also integrated the commentaries supplementing the Greek original texts into the Georgian translated text. Euthymios' approach shortened, interpolated, and compiled translations, not infrequently turning the Georgian text into a new version of the original.⁸⁹ Ephrem Mc'ire tried to justify Euthymios's method. In his words, the Athonite monk adapted and simplified the Georgian texts to enlighten immature and unsophisticated congregations unable to grasp complex texts meaningfully.⁹⁰ Ephrem praised Euthymios's style several times in his colophons as beautiful and refined and paid homage to the venerated Athonite monk for making complicated theological texts and ideas understandable for an audience not trained in theology and rhetoric. Nevertheless, Ephrem thought that Georgians had matured and became more enlightened in the decades after Euthymios' translations so it was necessary to develop a new approach that would transmit Byzantine/Christian thought better, in full scale, to a Georgian readership. Ephrem's new translations served this purpose.

Ephrem also revised some works of Giorgi the Athonite, equally as respected and learned as Euthymios. Ephrem held Giorgi in high esteem, referred to him as his teacher, and thought highly of the Gospels translated by Giorgi. Nonetheless, Ephrem was not satisfied with Giorgi's version of John Chrysostom's homilies on the Gospel of Matthew and translated the work again, adding his own commentaries.⁹¹

Ephrem's colophons and marginal notes reveal how carefully he approached the art of translation. One of his colophons relates that Ephrem was eager to translate Basil the Great's *Asceticon*. He knew that this work already existed in Georgian and tried to acquire a copy. He

⁸⁸ Bezarashvili 2013, 102; Kekelidze, *History of the Georgian Literature*, 188.

⁸⁹ Bezarashvili 2013, 104.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 103.

⁹¹ Khintibidze 1996, 117.

waited for twelve years and lost hope of finding the manuscript, so he did his own translation.⁹² There was another reason as to why Ephrem Mc‘ire was so careful when translating Greek texts into Georgian. An accurate translation would not leave room for Greek ecclesiastics and monks to accuse Georgians of corrupting sacred texts or deviating from Orthodoxy. For instance, Byzantines not infrequently criticized Euthymios’ style, followed by many Georgian learned monks, of expanding and abridging original texts in Georgian translations.

In the 1050s, Greek monks of the Black Mountain accused their Georgian peers of deviating from Orthodoxy and questioned the apostolic foundation of the Georgian Church. They appealed to the patriarch of Antioch, Theodosius III (1057–1059), beseeching him to take harsh measures against Georgians. The *Life of Giorgi the Athonite* narrates the story in the following way:

Some people from the monastery of St. Symeon, full of envy, rose against us, Georgians, and wished to get rid of every Georgian at St. Symeon. And so, according to their malice, they decided in their hearts to accuse our holy and true faith of defilement. This was because they were trying to eradicate the Georgians entirely from this glorious Lavra, although they had been accepted there by St. Symeon himself. And with these evil thoughts, they went to see Patriarch Theodosius [...] they knelt right in front of him and said [...] “Have mercy on us, holy master, and save us from a great disaster and free us from vain and foreign men, for in our monastery there are sixty people, calling themselves Georgians, but we know neither what they think nor what is their faith.” The patriarch was astonished to hear this and said: “how could it happen that the Georgians are not Orthodox?”⁹³

⁹² Kekelidze 1980, 254.

⁹³ Giorgi Mc‘ire, *The Life of Giorgi the Athonite* (ed. Abuladze), 149-150; Grdzeliidze 2009, 126: რამეთუ კაცნი ვინმე სუმეონ-წმიდელნი შურითა საუმაკოდათა აღიძრნეს ჩუენ ქართველთა ზედა და ენება, რაათამცა ნათესავი ჩუენი ძირითურთ აღმოჰვხურეს სუმეონ-წმიდით და განიზრახეს გულარძნილებით, რადა წმიდასა ამას და მართალსა სარწმუნოებასა ჩუენსა ბიწი რად დასწამონ. და ესრემთაცა სრულიად აღმოგუფხურნეს დიდებულისა ამისგან ლავრისა პირველთაგან თვთ წმიდისა სუმეონის მიერ დამკვდრებულნი. და ესრეთ ბოროტად შეიზრახნეს და წარვიდეს თევდოსი

Giorgi the Athonite was on Black Mountain when the tension between the Greeks and the Georgians peaked. He decided to defend the rights of Georgians and paid a visit to the patriarch of Antioch. During a polemic with the patriarch, Giorgi persuaded him to drop the charges against the Georgian monks and proved the Orthodoxy of the Georgians. Later, another issue was brought before Patriarch Theodosius III. This time, the Greek monks questioned the canonical right of the Georgian Church to be autocephalous. Giorgi the Athonite was again summoned to the court of the patriarch, where he was requested to recognize the subordination of the Georgian church to the Antiochian see. He was further advised to write a letter to King Bagrat IV (r. 1027–1072) and force him to admit the supremacy of the Antiochian patriarch over the Georgian Church.

It must be so that your churches and hierarchs be shepherd under the authority of this apostolic see [...] And you are capable of fulfilling this task since I know that your king will listen to you if you write to him and advise him for the better. And if he does not follow your advice, I shall write to all four of my fellow patriarchs, informing them of the self-devised legislation and obstinacy of your people and that they continue to claim autocephaly contrary to the apostolic canons, despite the fact that none of the Apostles reached their land.⁹⁴

პატრიარქისა წინაშე, ვითარცა ახლად შემოსრულისა და წუთ უმეცარისა და დაცვეს წინაშე რეცა მომჭირნედ და ჰრქუეს მას: „შეგუეწიენ, წმიდაო მეუფეო, და გვკსნენ დიდისა ჭირისაგან, და განგუათავისუფლენ კაცთაგან ამაოთა და უცხოთესლთა, რამეთუ არს მონასტერსა შინა ჩუენსა ვითარ სამეოცი კაცი, რომელნი ქართველად სახელად-იდებენ თავთა თვსტა და არა უწყით, თუ რასა ზრახვენ, ანუ რად არს სარწმუნოებად მათი. და ესრეთ დორიასად ზოგი მონასტერი დაუპყრიეს.“ და ესმა რად ესე პატრიარქსა, დაუკვრდა და ჰრქუა მათ: „და ვითარ ეგების ესე, რომელმცა ქართველნი არა მართლმადიდებელნი იყვნეს.“

⁹⁴ Giorgi Mc'ire, *The Life of Giorgi the Athonite* (ed. Abuladze), 153; Grdzelidze 2009, 128: ჯერ-არს, რომელ ეკლესიანი და მღვდელთ-მოდღუარნი თქუენნი ჳელა ქუეშე სამოციქულოჲსა ამის საყდრისასა იმწყსებოდინ (...) და ესე შენგან შესადღებელ არს, რამეთუ უწყრი, ვითარმედ გისმენს მეფე თქუენი, უკეთუ მიუწერო და აუწყო უმჯობესი. ხოლო უკუეთუ არა ისმინოს, მიუწერო ოთხთავე პატრიარქთა საყდრის-მოდგმათა ჩუენთა და ვაუწყო თვთარჩულობად და ქედვიცხ[ე]ლობად ნათესავისა თქუენისად, და ვითარმედ თვნიერ სამოციქულოჲსა კანონისა თვთ იმწყსებთან და მოციქულთაგანი არავინ მისრულ არს ქუეყანასა მათსა.

As the hagiographical text states, Patriarch Theodosius III denied the Georgian Church the right of autocephaly simply because no apostle had preached Christianity on the territory of Georgia. Giorgi the Athonite, in response, requested the Greek manuscript, *Visitations of the Apostle Andrew*, which turned out to contain an account proving that St. Andrew preached Christianity on Georgian territory. Giorgi the Athonite also reminded the Antiochian patriarch that one of the Twelve Apostles, Simon the Canaanite, was buried on the territory of western Georgia, at a place called Nik'opsia.⁹⁵ Giorgi also pointed out to the patriarch that, heresy and deviation from Orthodoxy had prevailed several times in the past in the Byzantine Empire, whereas the Georgian land and church had always stayed faithful to the true faith. "We were enlightened by the Holy Apostles, and since we have confessed One God, we have never renounced him, nor have our people ever been inclined towards heresy. Instead, we condemn and curse all apostates and heretics."⁹⁶

Although Giorgi the Athonite settled the matter and defended the canonical right of the Georgian Church, about two decades later, when Ephrem Mc'ire was active on the Black Mountain, tensions escalated again between the Greeks and Georgians. Ephrem composed a historical and polemical narrative, *Report on the Conversion of the Georgians, and Books in which this is Mentioned*. In this work, Ephrem addressed the recurring problem that caused disagreement between the Georgian and Greek communities.⁹⁷ Ephrem decided to refute Byzantine accusations through their own authoritative Greek narratives and therefore based his literary piece on the accounts of Late Antique ecclesiastical historians. He did extensive research and found all the Greek texts that preserved information on the conversion of the Georgian royal family. He also used an apocryphal, *Visitations of the Apostle Andrew* to prove that one

⁹⁵ Giorgi Mc'ire, *The Life of Giorgi the Athonite* (ed. Abuladze), 154; Grdzelidze 2009, 129.

⁹⁶ Giorgi Mc'ire, *The Life of Giorgi the Athonite* (ed. Abuladze), 154; Grdzelidze 2009, 129: ამათ წმიდათა მოციქულთა განათლებულნი ვართ და ვინაფთგან ერთი ღმერთი გვცნობიეს, არლარა უარ-გვყოფიეს და არცა ოდეს წვალებისა მიმართ მიდრეკილ არს ნათესავი ჩუენი. და ყოველთა უარის-მყოფელთა და მწვალებელთა შევაჩუენებთ და ვსწყევთ.

⁹⁷ Ephrem Mc'ire, *Report on the Conversion of the Georgians* (ed. Bregadze), 3–12.

of Christ's Apostles propagated Christianity in Georgia, thus buttressing the apostolic foundation of the Georgian church.⁹⁸ Although Ephrem's historical survey was written in Georgian, it is possible that he planned to translate it into Greek to make it accessible to a wider audience. The *Report on the Conversion of the Georgians* demonstrates that Ephrem was not only an eminent translator and theologian, but a historian as well.

The scale of Ephrem's literary activities and his output earned him great authority and fame not only among his fellow monks on the Black Mountain but in the Georgian kingdom as well. He was posthumously commemorated in the *synodikon* of the Ruis-Urbnisi church council convoked by order of King Davit IV (r. 1089–1125) in 1105 to reform the Georgian Church. King Davit IV closely monitored the council, and probably gave his consent to place Ephrem's name in the *synodikon* next to the names of Euthymios and Giorgi the Athonites.⁹⁹

Back to the Holy City: The re-emergence of Georgian monasticism in Jerusalem

Although Constantinople and Mount Athos acquired the rank of holy places after the advance of Islam, the accounts written in the post-Arab conquest period attest that Georgians continued to make pilgrimages to Jerusalem. A ninth-century concise hagiography, the *Life and Martyrdom of K'onstanti*, relates that before his execution K'onstanti, a Georgian aristocrat, went to Jerusalem, where he worshipped at the holy places.¹⁰⁰ Ilarion Kartveli also visited Jerusalem and stayed at the Lavra of Mar Saba in the 860s. A group of Georgian monks is said to have made the pilgrimage to Jerusalem in the *Life of Grigol Xanzteli*, a hagiography portraying events in the ninth century.¹⁰¹ It is claimed that Giorgi the Athonite visited Jerusalem twice in his lifetime. The first visit took place when Giorgi lived in Georgia and had just started his

⁹⁸ Ibid, 012.

⁹⁹ *The Acts of the Ruis-Urbnisi Council* (ed. Gabidzashvili), 196.

¹⁰⁰ *Martyrdom of K'onstanti* (ed. Abuladze), 166.

¹⁰¹ *Life of Grigol Xanzteli* (ed. Abuladze), 265, 286.

monastic life and the second visit occurred when Giorgi was already an established authority at Iviron monastery. Both times the purpose of his travel to the holy city was pilgrimage rather than translation activities. It is noteworthy that neither hagiographical text mentions the monasteries established in Late Antiquity by Peter the Iberian and his peers. It is likely that Georgian monks had abandoned these monasteries after the advance of Islam.

The unification of the Georgian states into a single kingdom at the end of the tenth century increased the royal court's interest and involvement in the patronage of monasteries and monastic communities in the Christian East. During the rule of King Bagrat IV (r. 1027–1072), financial and political support from him and his mother, Queen Mariam, made it possible for Giorgi-P'roxore to establish the Georgian monastery of the Holy Cross in Jerusalem. The exceptional role of the Georgian royal court in the construction of the Holy Cross was reflected on the wall paintings of the monastery. In the eighteenth century, when the Georgian traveler Gabašvili visited Jerusalem, he saw frescoes of three Georgian kings on the northern wall of the monastery: Mirian III, the first Christian king of Kartli, Vaxt'ang Gorgasali, and Bagrat IV, founder and main patron of the Holy Cross.¹⁰²

Giorgi-P'roxore, a learned monk, fostered scholarly activities at the Holy Cross and turned the monastery into the center of Georgian manuscript production. He could have been inspired by the examples of Iviron and the Black Mountain, where Georgian monks translated texts and produced manuscripts. Giorgi-P'roxore compiled and edited several manuscripts. One surviving manuscript with his autograph, a collection of male and female saints' lives, is preserved in the Bodleian Library in Oxford. In the colophon, Giorgi states:

God made me, poor P'roxore, worthy to write the book about the saints who enlighten our souls. And I have completed, assembled, and

¹⁰² Menabde 1980, 72–73.

donated this work with the Divine support and with the support of all saints, to the monastery of Holy Cross, which I have built.¹⁰³

Manuscript colophons also document that Giorgi-P'roxore invited Georgian monks, mainly scribes and copyists, to the monastery he founded and supervised their work. The colophon to the manuscript (*Jer. Geo.* 14), containing the works of Basil the Great and Gregory of Nazianzus, completed in 1055, says:

This holy book was written and completed [...] in the monastery of Holy Cross, built by father P'roxore [...] I unworthy Ioane Dvali with my hands and with the help of my blessed son, Michael, and by order of blessed man, Father Euthymios [...] created this book.¹⁰⁴

Particularly noteworthy among the works authored and supervised by Giorgi-P'roxore are liturgical manuscripts – the *Synaxarion*, *Paraklition*, and *Tveni* (December to February) – and a collection of saints' lives, known as “Pateric of Palestine.” The latter contains the lives of saints associated with Jerusalem and the Holy Land.¹⁰⁵ Despite Giorgi-P'roxore's attempts to raise the fame of the monastery he founded, literary activities at the Holy Cross never attained the same scale as at Iviron or the Black Mountain. The monks of the Holy Cross were mainly concerned with copying and multiplying manuscripts rather than focused on translating Greek texts into Georgian.

Throughout the centuries, however, the monastery of the Holy Cross was a marker of the Georgian kings' prestige and power in the Holy Land. The Bagratid kings not only patronized the monastery but tried

¹⁰³ Peeters 1912, 302: ღირს მყო ღმერთმან მე, გლახაკი პროხორე დაწერად ამის სულთა განმანათლებელისა წმიდათა მოწამეთა წიგნისა და გაკასრულე და შევმოხე და დავდევ ნებითა ღუთისაითა და შეწევნითა ყოველთა წმიდათა ჩემ მიერ აღშენებულსა ეკლესიისა წმიდისა ჯუარისასა.

¹⁰⁴ Цагарели 1888, 173: დაიწერა და განსრულდა ესე წიგნი (...) მონასტერსა შა ჯუარისასა, რომელი აღაშენა წმ. მამამან პროხორი, ბრძანებითა და მოღუაწებითა კურთხეულისა კაცისა მამისა ეფთვმისათა (...) ჳელითა უღირსისა ბერისა იოვანე დვალისათა და შვილისა ჩემისა კურთხეულისა მიქელისათა.

¹⁰⁵ Menabde 1980, 84–86.

to secure its unique status within Jerusalem. At the end of the eleventh century, the Holy Cross was burned and destroyed after Seljuk-Turks captured Jerusalem, but around 1108, it was restored by the order and with the support of King Davit IV (r. 1089–1125).¹⁰⁶ After Jerusalem's fall to Saladin in 1187, the Holy Cross and its property were expropriated by the Muslims. Nevertheless, Queen Tamar (r. 1184–1212), during whose reign the Georgian kingdom reached the apex of its political and military power, sent an envoy to Saladin, and offered 20 000 dinars in return for granting liberty to the Holy Cross. In the twelfth century, Georgian monks of the Holy Cross continued copying manuscripts.¹⁰⁷

The Georgian monks of the Holy Cross had a network of connections with their Georgian fellows from various monasteries of Byzantium and occasionally exchanged manuscripts with them. If we believe Giorgi the Athonite's *vita*, he knew Giorgi-P'roxore and they met each other in Jerusalem. Giorgi the Athonite arrived in Jerusalem with a special mission. He was persuaded by Queen Mariam, King Bagrat IV's mother, to travel from Constantinople to Jerusalem and deliver money to Giorgi-P'roxore so that he could finish the monastery of the Holy Cross. It is likely that Giorgi the Athonite also carried with him some manuscripts and was among the first to donate them to the library of the emerging Georgian monastery.

The manuscript colophons that are the primary sources for studying the networks among the Georgian monks of the Christian East confirm the exchange of manuscripts between the Holy Cross and the Black Mountain. For instance, Giorgi the Recluse, from the Black Mountain, copied the *vita* of St. Martha (Mother of Symeon the Younger) and sent it to the Holy Cross.¹⁰⁸

Conclusion

In the fourth century, the conversion of the Georgian royal family and the subsequent advance of Christianity gave a powerful impetus for a

¹⁰⁶ *Life of Davit* (ed. Šanidze), 208; Thomson, 343.

¹⁰⁷ Menabde 1980, 96.

¹⁰⁸ Djobadze 1976, 25–32.

cultural transformation of Georgian society. The creation of the original Georgian alphabet and the flowering of monasticism in the Christian East were direct consequences of Christianization, which facilitated the reception of diverse Christian literature in Georgian. The evidence suggests that the first centers of Georgian manuscript production and translating activities emerged in the Holy Land and vicinity of Jerusalem.

While Georgian monasteries and monastic communities appeared in the Holy Land between the fourth and the fifth centuries, the early history of monasticism in Kartli/Iberia is *terra incognita*. The large monasteries in Kartli/Iberia were founded much later than in the Holy Land. According to the tradition, monasticism in eastern Georgia is associated with the arrival of “thirteen Syrian fathers” from Syria in the sixth century.¹⁰⁹ The monasteries founded by the Syrian fathers were modeled on the Syriac monastic tradition, which suggests that the monks in these monasteries would have adhered to asceticism and severe forms of mortification rather than focusing on manuscript production.¹¹⁰

Although it may seem paradoxical, the prominent centers of Georgian literary activities and manuscript productions were located in the Christian East and Byzantium, where monastic communities were more productive in translating texts than in Georgia. The history of the Georgian monastic communities in the Christian East demonstrates a high degree of cooperation, which resulted in the exchange of manuscripts and mobility among the monks. Manuscript colophons reveal that the Georgian monks of Mar Saba, St. Catherine’s on Sinai, and the Lavra of Chariton forged connections and exchanged manuscripts as early as the ninth century.

The growth of the Georgian world’s acquaintance with Byzantine culture and the large-scale reception of early Christian and Byzantine authors is closely linked with the flowering of literary activities on Mount Athos, Mount Olympus, Constantinople, and the Black Mountain. The Georgian monastic communities of the Byzantine Empire had even stronger connections with the Georgian monasteries and the royal court. All genres of translated Greek texts and manuscripts circulated

¹⁰⁹ Matitashvili 2018, 4–39.

¹¹⁰ On a peculiarities of Syrian Monastic practices see: Patrīch 1995, 22–28.

widely through various channels in Georgia, which further oriented the Georgian Church on Constantinople. In the eleventh-century Georgian monastic communities of the Black Mountain rose in prominence and succeeded in translating a wide range of texts by Early Christian and Byzantine authors. Nevertheless, some Georgians considered the Iviron Monastery on Mount Athos as the primary center of knowledge and manuscript production. Giorgi Mc'ire, learned monk and biographer of Giorgi the Athonite, lauded Iviron as the place “where the light of the knowledge of divinely spiritual books had shone through our holy father Euthymios and then through this blessed father Giorgi”.¹¹¹

¹¹¹ Giorgi Mc'ire, *The Life of Giorgi the Athonite* (ed. Abuladze), 174–175; Grdzelidze 2009, 142.

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