

*Philology*

## St Gabriel Mtsire and his Work “Gvirgvini” (the Crown)

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**ABSTRACT.** St Gabriel Mtsire is one of the prominent representatives of the Gareji Monastery School. Information available about him is scant. Those worth mentioning are the postscript to The Crown by King Giorgi's son Bagrat dated 3 April 1815 and the manuscript of the book *Jvarshemosili*. Present paper refers to Gabriel Mtsire's work *Gvirgvini* (The Crown). The purpose of the study is to identify the sources from which Gabriel Mtsire composed *Gvirgvini*. In order to determine the origin of the narratives in *Gvirgvini*, we compared them to the Georgian translation of six various collections of patericons and English-Greek edition. The link between the narrations of *Gvirgvini* and the texts compared was proved and the original sources of the narratives were identified. From the beginning to the end, the text of *Gvirgvini* is thematically organized. The structure of the book prepares readers to fully understand the essence of each issue. The postscript to *Gvirgvini* by King Giorgi's son Bagrat dated 3 April 1815 states that it was Gabriel Mtsire, who compiled the work. The peculiar features of the compilation and the dates of the autographs also point to this. © 2019 Bull. Georg. Natl. Acad. Sci.

**Key words:** Gabriel Mtsire, *Gvirgvini*, Gareja, textual scholarship

Gabriel Mtsire was one of the prominent representatives of the John the Baptist monastery in Mravalmta hermitage. Literary and educational work in the monastery was especially active from the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. A lot of religious and civilian figures received education in the monastery. They became actively involved in state affairs later.

Information about Gabriel Mtsire is scant. In this regard, the postscript about St Gabriel to *Gvirgvini* by King Giorgi's son Bagrat dated 3 April 1815 is particularly interesting, which says that before becoming a monk, St Gabriel was a

tailor and lived in Tbilisi. Then, leaving his mother and brothers, he went to the monastery, and took monastic vows. One day, Archdeacon Ioane Chubinidze, who was in the John the Baptist Monastery, decided to visit Tbilisi and he asked St Gabriel to accompany him. On their way back from Tbilisi, Laks (Dagestanis) assaulted them near the Mravaltskaro Ravine and killed them both in 1802 [1].

Also, there is an important piece of information about Gabriel Mtsire in the manuscript of *Jvarshemosili* [2]. According to that St Gabriel left the monastery because of his

deteriorating health. The two reasons are not exclusive. Gabriel might be sick, but still he did not deem it reasonable to let his spiritual brother travel alone.

As regards the time of St Gabriel taking monastic vows, it should be noted that when Schemamonk Serapion died, Gabriel Mtsire was not yet in the St John the Baptist Monastery. St Gabriel writes, that Schemamonk Serapion, passed away shortly before his arrival there [3]. Father Serapion died in 1773. Therefore, it is clear that Gabriel Mtsire came to the monastery around 1773. According to Ivane Lolashvili, he was about 20-25 at that time, but he does not refer to any document to confirm this.

According to Korneli Kekelidze, St Gabriel's literary activities started from 1780 [4]. First he started copying the existing manuscripts and then compiled collections of works himself. Today, we know eight books associated with Gabriel Mtsire's name. Most prominent of them is the original work *Jvarshemosili (Stavrophore)*, while the others - "*Samothkis Quavili*" (*The Flower of the Paradise*), *Okhros Tskaro (The Gold Brook)*, *klite (The Key)*, *Supeva (The Reign)*, *Manana (Manna)*, *Samaseuli (The Three Hundred)*, and *Gvirgvini (The Crown)* - are the compiled collections.

The text of *Gvirgvini* is kept in various libraries of old manuscripts: Thirty-four copies in the National Centre of Manuscripts, two copies in the Georgian National Archive, three copies in the Kutaisi Historic and Ethnographic Museum, one copy in the Dadiani Palaces Historical and Architectural Museum, one copy in the Sergi Makalatia State Museum of History, two copies in the Wardrop collection in Bodleian Library, University of Oxford and one copie in the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts of the Russian Academy of Sciences, St. Petersburg.

The abundance of the copies of *Gvirgvini* manuscripts makes clear how popular and important it was in Georgia. The book has five

chapters and each of them has 20 narratives – patericons - with thematic subheadings. Such a structure makes the composition of the book firm, reinforcing its didactic impact. St Gabriel prepares readers for the precise understanding of five main issues from the beginning to the end of the text, which enables as much of the essence of the work as possible to reach readers' minds.

At the end of the manuscript, in "The Stamp", St Gabriel clarifies the principles of compiling the book. He writes: "It comprises five chapters like the five senses we, humans, have and the number of spiritual narratives is a hundred like the fable about the hundred sheep" [5].

In 1892, St Stepane (Vasil) Karbelashvili (1858-1936, consecrated a saint on 20 December 2011) published the text of *Gvirgvini* with a preface, in which he wrote: "As regards the age of this book, I think that it was compiled much earlier than in 1240 allegedly by Father Petre, who passed away in 1250 and was buried in the Gelati Monastery. He also compiled *Gvirgvini motsameobisa (The Crown of Martyrdom)*" [6]. Aforementioned *Gvirgvini motsameobisa* cannot be found in the collections of ancient manuscripts. Therefore, it is impossible to compare it with the text of *Gvirgvini*.

King George XII's son Bagrat provides important information about the compiler of *Gvirgvini (The Crown)*: "This crown of the Holy Spirit was compiled by monk Gabriel, who worked in St John the Baptist Monastery in Mravalmta and who selected these holy teachings from the works by many holy fathers and compiled them in one book that was to be useful for the repentance of the sinners" [7]. This note was written in 1815 and St Gabriel passed away in 1802. It is noteworthy that Gabriel Mtsire maintained close relations with King George XII. Given this fact, King George's son could have reliable information about the works of Gabriel Mtsire. Korneli Kekelidze also concluded that it was Gabriel Mtsire, who compiled *Gvirgvini* [8].

Mikheil Kavtaria [9] and Nino Melikishvili [10] also shared the same opinion.

It should be taken into account that the oldest manuscripts of *Gvirgvini* were copied personally by Gabriel Mtsire. There is also a copy written by Gabriel Mtsire's spiritual son Porfiri, who did the work on the order of St Gabriel.

It is noteworthy that the composition and structure of *Gvirgvini* is very similar to the structure of other books described by Gabriel Mtsire. Six of the seven books he wrote are supplemented with "Stamps" that explain the structure and symbolic meaning of the collections of works. Symbolic meaning is given to the number of narratives in the collections of works compiled by Gabriel Mtsire. The same is true of *Gvirgvini*.

Given the aforementioned, we consider the note by Bagrat and Korneli Kekelidze's opinion are relevant and it is Gabriel Mtsire, who is the compiler of the collection of works *Gvirgvini*.

In order to establish the origin of the narratives in *Gvirgvini*, it became necessary to compare them with patericons translated at different times. The list of the sources compared is as follows:

1. The collection of patericons by John Moschus (550-634, the 7<sup>th</sup> century, *Leimonarion* [11]);
2. *The Alphanumeric Patericon. Selected Teachings of Scetic Fathers* [12];
3. *The Lausaicon* by St Palladius of Helenopolis [13];
4. *Teachings of Holy Fathers* translated by Euthymius the Athonite (11<sup>th</sup> century);
5. The collection of the teachings and narratives of holy fathers of the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries by Hieromonach Theophilus;
6. *Leimonarion. Lives of Desert Fathers* [14];
7. The book entitled *The Anonymous Sayings of the Desert Fathers* [15], with narratives published in Greek and English. It is a collection of apophthegmatic narratives (Apophthegmata Patrum).

*Leimonarion* by John Moschus published by Iliia Abuladze and called Samotxe (*Paradise*) [16] in Georgian, is based on three manuscripts: those

of Athos 9, 977, Sinai 36, 925, and Sinai 68, the 13<sup>th</sup> century. The postscript of the book says: "This book is called *Paradise* and it comprises the deeds and thoughts of holy fathers".

The comparison between *Gvirgvini* and *Leimonarion* by John Moschus provides grounds to say that there is indeed a certain similarity between them. The content of narratives 19, and 28 in *Gvirgvini* coincides with the text of *Leimonarion* by John Moschus.

It is also noteworthy that the content of the narratives in *Gvirgvini* coincides with the texts included in the book *The Alphanumeric Patericon. Selected Teachings of Scetic Fathers* [17]. The aforementioned book is based on three manuscripts, those of Athos 12 (10-11<sup>th</sup> cc), Sinai 35 (10<sup>th</sup> c) and Sinai 8 (11<sup>th</sup> c). The coincidences some of the narratives of *Gvirgvini* such as 23, 24, 26, 44, 51, 75, 82, 84, 90, 96, and 97 can be found in the aforementioned edition.

The comparison also made it clear that narratives 90 and 91 of *Gvirgvini* coincide with the text of *Lausaicon* [18]. Narratives 72, 74, 75, 80, 85, and 98 in *Gvirgvini* coincide with the translation by Euthymius the Athonite.

The book *Teachings and Narratives of Fathers* by Hieromonach Theophilus was published in 2014. *Gvirgvini* shows most similarities with this work. The aforementioned edition is based on the autograph of Hieromonach Theophilus of the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries [19], which he translated from a Greek source.

The content of narratives 1, 4, 5, 6, 23, 24, 26, 37, 39, 40, 44, 48, 49, 51, 56, 59, 69, 70, 71, 72, 74, 75, 77, 80, 81, 82, 84, 85, 86, 90, 96, and 98 of *Gvirgvini* coincides with the translation of Hieromonach Theophilus. For comparison we used *Old Georgian Translations of Medieval Novels* [20], where the autograph by Hieromonach Theophilus is compared with texts A 1339, A 528, H 1342, Qut 40, and A 169 (National Centre of Manuscripts). St Gabriel Mtsire might use the aforementioned manuscripts when compiling

*Gvirgvini*, particularly copies under the numbers A 1339 and A 169, as they belonged to the Davit Gareji Monastery.

We compared *Leimonarion* by John Moschus translated into Georgian in the 10<sup>th</sup> century and published by Ilia Abuladze in 1960, with *Leimonarion* published in 2014, which was translated from Russian. The numerations of the narratives of the two editions do not coincide. Some narratives given in the version of the 10<sup>th</sup> century are not found in the edition of 2014 and vice versa. The *Gvirgvini* contents of 13, 15, 19, 28, 57, 59, 63, 64, 65, 76, 95, and 97 narratives coincides with 2014 edition of *Leimonarion*.

The comparison of *Gvirgvini* with the English-Greek book *The Anonymous Sayings of the Desert Fathers* made it clear that the content of the narratives 40, 51, 53, 56, 70, 72, 81, 97, and 98 of *Gvirgvini* coincides with the English-Greek book, which is based on three manuscripts: *Paris Coislin*

126 (11<sup>th</sup> c); *Sinai St Catherine* 448 (1004); *Vatic. Graec.* 1599 (10<sup>th</sup> c).

In some cases, Gabriel Mtsire borrows the titles of narratives in *Gvirgvini* from the original sources uniting them under one idea. He makes the plots of narratives more compact and enriches them with quotations from the *Gospel*. It is noteworthy that the style of *Gvirgvini* differs from the aforementioned manuscripts.

It is well known that the Davit Gareji and John the Baptist monasteries had rich libraries. St Gabriel was able to access materials that are part of the treasure trove of Georgian literature. From these rich collections he selected thematically interesting narratives corresponding to the main idea of his book.

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*ფილოლოგია*

## წმიდა გაბრიელ მცირე და მისი ნაშრომი „გვრგვინი“

გ. კალანდაძე

*იაკობ გოგებაშვილის სახ. თელავის სახელმწიფო უნივერსიტეტი, ჰუმანიტარულ მეცნიერებათა ფაკულტეტი, თელავი, საქართველო*

(წარმოდგენილია აკადემიის წევრის ა. არაბულის მიერ)

წმიდა გაბრიელ მცირე გარეჯის სამონასტრო სკოლის ერთ-ერთი თვალსაჩინო წარმომადგენელია. მის შესახებ მწირი ცნობები მოიპოვება. მათ შორის აღსანიშნავია: „გვრგვინი“ 1815 წლის 3 აპრილით დათარიღებულ ხელნაწერზე მეფე გიორგის ძის, ბაგრატის მინაწერი და ხელნაწერი წიგნი „ჯუარშემოსილი“. გაბრიელ მცირის ლიტერატურულ მოღვაწეობას უკავშირდება სასულიერო კრებულები: „ჯუარშემოსილი“, „სამოთხის ყუაველი“, „ოქროს წყარო“, „კლიტე“, „სუფევა“, „მანანა“, „სამასელი“ და „გვრგვინი“. ამჯერად ჩვენი კვლევის საგანია „გვრგვინი“. კრებული ისეა შედგენილი, რომ მისი სტრუქტურა ეხმარება მკითხველს მასალის აღქმასა და დედააზრის გაცნობიერებაში. „გვრგვინი“ შემდგენელი რომ გაბრიელ მცირეა, ვგებულობთ გიორგი მეფის შვილის ბაგრატის მიერ 1815 წლის 3 აპრილით დათარიღებულ ხელნაწერის მინაწერიდან. ამასვე მეტყველებს წიგნის შედგენის თავისებურებები და ავტოგრაფთა შექმნის დრო. „გვრგვინი“ თხრობათა წარმომავლობის დასადგენად იგი შევადარეთ ქართულად გადმოთარგმნილი პატერიკების ექვს სხვადასხვა კრებულს, ასევე – ინგლისურ-ბერძნულ გამოცემას. გამოიკვეთა შედარებულ ტექსტებთან „გვრგვინის“ თხრობათა კავშირი და დადგინდა თხრობათა პირველწყაროები.

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