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The Georgian Books of the First Tbilisi Printing Press and Their Artistic Decoration (1709–1722)

In Georgia, the first printed books in the Georgian language were published in Tbilisi in 1709.¹ Prince Vakhtang, then the governor of Kartli (1703–1714), later the king of Kartli Vakhtang VI (1716–1724),² played a crucial role in advancing this national cause. The establishment of the press and the printing of books became possible with the help of Antim the Iberian (1650–1716, called Antim Ivireanul by the Romanians), a scholar of Georgian origin, whose entire life and activities were

1 It is important to note that the first Georgian book was printed in 1629 in Rome. Two Georgian books were published in the Propaganda Fide printing press: a *Georgian Alphabet with a Prayer* and a *Georgian-Italian Dictionary*. Nikoloz (Nikiphore) Irubakidze-Cholokashvili, the representative of Georgia to Italy, greatly assisted the Italian side in the book editing and the set-up of the Georgian printing press in Rome. In 1643–1670, Francisco Maria Maggio's *Grammar of the Georgian Language* was also printed in Rome. This kind of literature would be of great help to the Catholic missionary monks who came from Rome to Georgia. See M. Tamarati, *L'Église géorgienne dès l'origine jusqu'à nos jours*, Rome, 1920, p. 505; J. Vateishvili, *Kartuli Tsignis Bechdvis istoria. XVII–XVIII ss.*, Tbilisi, 2017, p. 9. The second stage of Georgian book printing is connected with the name of Archil II (1647–1713), the king of Imereti, a scholar and poet who left Georgia for Russia in 1699. In 1705, he succeeded in printing the Psalter in the press of the Holy Synod in Moscow. See D. Karitchashvili, *Kartuli Tsignis Bechdvis Istorია*, Tbilisi, 1929, p. 44–48; Vateishvili, *Kartuli Tsignis*, p. 442–474.

2 The story of the Tbilisi printing press is present in Georgian and foreign historiography. Since the 1880s, several research works were dedicated to it, defining the dates and chronology: Z. Chichinadze, *Kartuli Stamba da Vakhtang VI*, Tbilisi, 1909; A. Shanidze, “Kartuli Stambis Istoriisatvis”, *Literaturuli Memkvidreoba*, t. I, 1935, p. 156–178; G. Kiknadze, T. Nakashidze et al. (eds.), *Kartuli Tsigni. Bibliografia, 1612–1920*, t. I, Tbilisi, 1941; G. Leonidze, “Kartuli Erovnuli Stambis Istoriistvis”, *Drosha*, 2, 1951, p. 16–19; K. Sharashidze, *Pirveli Stamba Sakartveloshi, 1709–1722*, Tbilisi, 1955; S. Kurdghelashvili, *Kartuli Stambis Istoriidan*, Tbilisi, 1959; O. Kasradze, *Kartuli Tsignis Bechdvis Kerebi*, Tbilisi, 1980; A. Ioseliani, *Kartuli Mtsignobrobis, Tsignisa da Stambis Istoriis Sakitkhebi*, Tbilisi, 1990; N. Targamadze, “Vakhtang VI Stambis Istoriisatvis”, *Mtsignobari*, 9, 2009, p. 9–18; D. Machaidze (ed.), *Vakhtang VI Stambis Gamotsemebi*, Tbilisi, 2009; M. Gachechiladze, “Peculiarities of the Georgian Printed Book Design (17th–19th c.)”, *Georgian Antiquities*, 13, 2009, p. 168–187; V. Căndea, *Mărturii românești peste hotare. Creații românești și izvoare despre români în colecții din străinătate*, ed. I. Feodorov, vol. II, Bucharest, 2011, p. 192–199; T. Zhordania, “Mokle Istoriuli Mimokhilva Kartuli Stambis Darsebisa da Mokmedebisa Metvramete Saukuneshi da Metskhramete Saukunis Pirvel Tselta Ganmavlobashi”, in K. Nadiradze (ed.), *The Collection of Essays*, Tbilisi, 2011, p. 117–125; T. Zhordania, *Kronikebi*, t. II, Tbilisi, 2018, p. 482–483.

associated with Romania. Antim the Iberian was metropolitan of Wallachia from 1708 to 1716 and played a significant role in both state and church affairs.³

At the turn of the 17th–18th centuries, Georgia underwent a remarkable cultural resurgence amidst challenging political and economic circumstances, along with ongoing conflicts with its Muslim neighbors. After the death of King Vakhtang V of Kartli (also known as Shahnavaz, 1658–1675), his successor Giorgi XI ascended the throne. He failed to become a real ruler, carrying out flattering Iranian policy. The desire to unify Georgia and fight against treacherous feudals contradicted the policy of Iran in Georgia. Thus, the distrust of the Shah of Iran resulted in the removal of the king, and in 1688 Erekle I, known as Nazarali Khan, who strictly followed and defended the Shah's policy, ascended the throne. Soon, the Shah reconciled and reinstated Giorgi XI as king. However, he was requested to go to Iran and sent to fight against the Afghans, who posed a great threat to the Persians at the time.⁴ His nephew Vakhtang (later, King Vakhtang VI), the son of Prince Levan, was appointed as viceroy (provincial governor) of Kartli. It must be said that among the numerous heirs of Vakhtang V, only a few acted for the good of Georgia, and among them Giorgi XI (1651–1709), Archil (1647–1713, king of Imereti, then Kakheti), Prince Levan (†1709), and his sons Vakhtang (later King Vakhtang VI) and Domenti (1677?–1741, then, catholicos Damian/Domenti).

From 1703, Prince Vakhtang, who was appointed as viceroy, managed to establish peace, temporarily halted the Persians and the Ottomans, overcame external and internal invasions and resistance, established strict laws, and abolished the sale of captives. Despite the presence of a Persian garrison based in Tbilisi Tower (Nariqala), Vakhtang enthusiastically began the cultural and educational reconstruction of the country. The development of agriculture, which was vital for the

3 É. Picot, "Notice biographique et bibliographique sur l'imprimeur Anthime d'Ivire, Métropolitain de Valachie", *Nouveaux Mélanges Orientaux*, Paris, 1886, p. 515–560; F. Djindjikhvili, *Антимоз Ивериელი*, Tbilisi, 1967; O. Gvinchidze, *Antim Iverieli*, Tbilisi, 1973; G. Ştrempel, *Antim Ivireanul*, Bucharest, 1997; N. V. Dură, "Antimoz Iverieli (Anthim the Iberian). New Contributions on His Life and Printing Activity", *Bulletin of the Georgian National Academy of Sciences*, 10, 2016, 2, p. 153–161; G. Shurgaia, "The Martyred Metropolitan. Anthimos the Iberian († 1716) in Contemporaneous Sources of History", *Proceedings of the Seventh International Symposium of Kartvelian Studies: Georgia in the Context of European Civilizations*, Tbilisi, 2016, p. 221–222.

4 George XI was killed in a battle with the Afghans near Kandahar in 1709, while protecting the Shah's interests. Prince Levan and a large group of Georgian warriors were also killed in battle. See A. Baramidze, *Sulkhan Saba*, Tbilisi, 1959, p. 9–10.

country, and the expansion of trade and craftsmanship were his main concerns. At that time, Tbilisi became a well-connected center of trade.⁵

The renovation and restoration works that he carried out are especially important. According to contemporaries, he built palaces, and among them the Tbilisi palace, outstanding in richness and grandeur, about which it was written: “I have never seen a more beautiful house in the entire Iran”.⁶ The number of *caravanseraï* also increased. Tbilisi Sioni, Urbanisi Church, and the Saint John the Baptist Church were reconstructed by the king.

Vakhtang initiated the creation of a “Council of Learned Men”, which collected the existing historical documents, old manuscripts, and manuscripts of the *Chronicles of Kartli*. The best scholars and literati of the time (Sulkhan Saba Orbeliani, Prince Vakhushti, Nikoloz Orbeliani, etc.) worked at the court. Works of original content were composed, and translations were made of the masterpieces of world literature and science: *Kalila and Dimna*, a collection of tales of Indian origin, was translated from Persian into Georgian by Sulkhan Saba Orbeliani; Vakhtang himself translated Ulugh Beg’s astronomical treatise from Persian. An important endeavor was the search for old manuscripts and their subsequent re-translation. The changes made in the philosophic and lexicographical domains meant that a more simplified literary language, closer to the vernacular, gained precedence. All branches of science came under the scholarly king’s scrutiny, and remarkable progress was made in all directions. The incipient process of cultural reconstruction created the need for European-style publishing.

By all appearances, the establishment of a printing press and publishing activities in Tbilisi had been a long-standing dream of the royal court. However, the difficult political and economic environment had prevented it from coming to fruition. The necessity of printing was also generated by the fact that “our sacred writings were corrupted during copying by hand”.⁷ At the same time, the printed book, in addition to presenting the texts correctly and without errors, ensured a rapid increase in the number of volumes needed.

It is noteworthy that Vakhtang did not turn for help with printing to his uncle Archil, who had moved to Russia (and already had the experience of printing Georgian books in Russia), but to the Patriarch of Jerusalem. In the 17th and 18th centuries, the situation of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem forced the patriarchs to constantly travel to Orthodox countries, including Georgia, to collect donations

5 B. Vakhushti, *Aghtsera Sameposa Sakartvelosa*, Tbilisi, 1941, p. 37–45; N. Berdzenishvili, Iv. Javakhishvili, S. Janashia, *Sakartvelos Istoria*, Tbilisi, 1949, p. 362–363.

6 V. Beridze, “XVIII Saukunis Tbilisi Vakhtangis Gegmis Mikhedvit”, *Analebi*, I, 1947, p. 134–135.

7 *Acts of the Apostles*, 1709, colophon of the editor Nikoloz Orbeliani, f. 421.

and receive material help.⁸ At the same time, the close connection with the highest religious circles in Jerusalem was very important for the Georgians. They were gradually losing the Georgian churches and monasteries that were in their possession in Jerusalem and sought the support of the patriarch of Jerusalem in this matter. Patriarchs often helped the Georgian authorities to pay their debts; they played the role of mediator, delivering the paid taxes from Georgia to Jerusalem. The Patriarchs of Jerusalem Paisios (1645–1660) and Dositheos II Notaras (1667–1707) visited Georgia on different occasions.

The patriarchs of Jerusalem and the kings of Georgia maintained a regular correspondence. It is important to note that in Georgian academic circles there is a widespread opinion that the idea of setting up a printing press in Tbilisi was suggested to the royal family by the patriarchs of the East. In 1681, during his second visit to Georgia, Patriarch Dositheos of Jerusalem personally met King George XI and his brother Prince Levan, father of Vakhtang VI. Interestingly, one modern source suggests that Antim the Iberian accompanied the Patriarch Dositheos to Tbilisi in 1681, acting as his interpreter, and introduced to his compatriots the idea of establishing a printing press in Georgia.⁹ Hence, it can probably be assumed that years later Vakhtang had to achieve the project of establishing a press in Tbilisi, according to the wishes of his father and his uncle George XI, who themselves were inspired by Antim.

Vakhtang asked the patriarch of Jerusalem, Dositheos (who resigned in 1707 and died in 1709), for help in setting up a printing press, but the request of the ruler of Kartli was fulfilled by Dositheos's nephew, the following patriarch of Jerusalem, Chrysanthos Notaras (1707–1731). As known, Patriarch Dositheos of Jerusalem, during a visit to Iași in Moldavia, purchased the necessary equipment for printing in Greek and founded a printing press there (1670).¹⁰ Dositheos, and later Chrysanthos, were prominent Church leaders: “Of the learned patriarchs, Jerusalem produced the great names of Dositheos, Chrysanthos, and others, whose encyclopedic erudition are absolutely astonishing”, wrote the famous diplomat Konstantin Bazili.¹¹

8 K. Bazili, *Сирия и Палестина под турецким правительством в историческом и политическом отношениях*, t. II, St. Petersburg, 1875, p. 200; Kurdghelashvili, *Kartuli Stambis*, p. 8.

9 “Antim the Iberian, who resided at the Patriarchate of Jerusalem for 23 years, was likely serving as an interpreter in the intense correspondence and interactions between the patriarch of Jerusalem and the kings and catholicoses of Georgia. This leads us to believe that Antim the Iberian, as the person performing the duties of a translator, was one of the companions of Patriarch Dositheos on his journey to Tbilisi in 1681”, cf. Kurdghelashvili, *Kartuli Stambis*, p. 16–17. There is no other source in support of this supposition.

10 A. Muravyov, *История Св. Града Иерусалима*, t. II, St. Petersburg, 1844, p. 342.

11 Bazili, *Сирия и Палестина*, t. II, p. 221–222.

Thus, having received Vakhtang's request, the patriarch of Jerusalem turned for support to the ruler of Wallachia, Constantin Brâncoveanu. He counted on Antim the Iberian, because of his Georgian origin, to help advance this project.

It is not at all clear when Antim came to Wallachia. According to the secretary of Prince Constantin Brâncoveanu, Anton Maria del Chiaro, Antim (born Andrei) was a slave in Jerusalem in his youth.¹² Del Chiaro, who knew Antim personally, also noted that: "He was endowed with such rare talents that he could admirably imitate any kind of craftsmanship, especially carvings, paintings, and embroidery".¹³ A plausible hypothesis is that Antim, a protégé of Patriarch Dositheos, learned the art of printing in the newly established press of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem that operated at the Monastery of Cetățuia near Iași. This could have happened around 1689–1690.¹⁴ When Prince Constantin Brâncoveanu sought to expand the printing

12 A. M. del Chiaro, *Istoria delle moderne rivoluzioni della Valachia. Con la descrizione del paese, natura, costumi, riti e religione degli abitanti*, new edition by N. Iorga, Bucharest, 1914, p. 51. For the life and works of Antim the Iberian, see Archim. M. Stanciu, "Descoperiri recente referitoare la venirea Sfântului Antim Ivireanul în Țările Române", *Ortodoxia*, 66, 2014, 1, p. 132–142; Archim. M. Stanciu, "Sfântul Antim Ivireanul, ipodiaconul Mihail Iștvanovici și începuturile tiparului Georgian", *Ortodoxia*, 67, 2015, 3, p. 83–100; Doru Bădără, *The Beginning of Printing and Print Culture in the Romanian Principalities*, in R. Dipratu, S. Noble (eds.), *Arabic-Type Books Printed in Wallachia, Istanbul, and Beyond. First Volume of Collected Works of the TYPARABIC Project*, Berlin/Boston, 2024, p. 123–144.

13 "Era egli dotato di sì rari talenti, che sapeva mirabilmente imitare qualsisia sorta di manufatture, specialmente in genere d'intagli, disegni e ricami"; A. M. del Chiaro, *Istoria delle moderne rivoluzioni*, p. 202.

14 Archim. P. Chițulescu (coord. ed.), *Antim Ivireanul. Opera tipografică*, Bucharest, 2016, p. 11–13 (with an overview of the Romanian sources on Antim the Iberian). See also Muravyov, *История Св. Града*, II, p. 329; Kurdgelashvili, *Kartuli Stambis*, p. 30–33. It is known that in the 17th century the Patriarchate of Jerusalem went through hard times. Patriarch Dositheos resided in Constantinople for a long time. During his visit to Iași in 1670, Patriarch Dositheos secured a press and typographic equipment and founded the printing press of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem in Constantinople. Hieromonk Mitrofan, a master brought from Wallachia, was appointed as the head of the printing press. It was probably Hieromonk Mitrofan who later trained Antim in the art of printing. There is also an opinion that by the time Antim arrived in the Romanian Principalities he was already a scholar and an artist, brought up in the traditions of Georgian culture. Otar Gvinchidze points out that in Wallachia he was not the supporter of Greek traditions, since he opposed the hegemony of the Greek Orthodox Church and was in favor of the superiority of the Romanian language. Gvinchidze shares the opinions of the Romanian scholars Ion Nanu and Petre Constantinescu-Iași about the influence of Georgian art on Romanian art and he considers that Antim the Iberian was the initiator of this trend. See O. Gvinchidze, *Antim the Iberian*, p. 23–24, 334–335; P. Constantinescu-Iași, "Din relațiile culturale româno-gruzine", *Studii și articole de istorie*, II, 1957, p. 6–32; I. Nanu, "Kartuli daruminuli xelovnebis urtiertoba", *Soviet Art*, 8, 1963, p. 83–88; G. Ștrempele, *Antim Ivireanul. Predici*, Bucharest, 1962, p. 35.

and publishing activities in Wallachia, the learned men at his court recommended Antim the Iberian for his versatile talents.¹⁵

Antim's name is associated with the foundation of several Wallachian presses. His first printing activities were connected with the Bucharest printing press in 1691, where books in various fields were printed: theology, history, literature, philosophy, etc. He laid the foundation for the printing of books in the Romanian language. He built the Monastery of All Saints in Bucharest and wrote a *Typikon* for the monastic community and the press he set up there. Antim the Iberian rose through the ecclesiastical hierarchy: he became the hegumen of the Snagov Monastery near Bucharest, then bishop of Râmnic, and finally, metropolitan of Wallachia. On his initiative, printing presses were established and operated in Snagov, Râmnic, Târgoviște, and Bucharest. A total of 64 books in Romanian, Greek, Church Slavonic, and Arabic were printed under his patronage in Wallachia.¹⁶ From a technical point of view, the books printed by Antim were of the same quality as books printed in the presses of the European countries of that time. In some features, such as the elegance and detail of the book art elements (engravings, vignettes, borders, decorative elements, etc.), they were even superior. Antim's part in the establishment of the first Arabic printing press in Ottoman lands, in Aleppo (1706), is also worth mentioning.¹⁷

It is therefore not surprising that a renowned book printer was asked to help establish the first printing press in Tbilisi. In this sense, it was suggested that Vakhtang's brother, Prince Domenti, travelled to Wallachia and Jerusalem at the end of the 17th century. This journey was described by his closest friend and companion Yese Tlashadze in his chief poetic work.¹⁸

Yese Tlashadze was a Georgian poet of the first half of the 18th century. He composed the poem *Bakarian*, or *Katalikoz-Bakarian*, written in Constantinople in 1727. This work is interesting because it contains information that is not found in other sources. It is a history of Vakhtang VI and his son Bakar, with special attention

15 N. Șerbănescu, "Antim Ivireanul, tipograf", *BOR*, 77, 1950, 8–9, p. 695. Constantin Brâncoveanu (1688–1714) played a significant part in the advancement of printing in Wallachia. He actively supported the free distribution of printed books to the Christian East. See I. Feodorov, *Arabic Printing for the Christians in Ottoman Lands. The East-European Connection*, Berlin/Boston, 2023, p. 255–308.

16 Chițulescu (coord. ed.), *Antim Ivireanul*, p. 31–34.

17 I. Feodorov, "New Data on the Early Arabic Printing in the Levant and Its Connections to the Romanian Presses", *RESEE*, 56, 2018, p. 197–233; I. Feodorov, "Working together for the Antiochian Patriarchate: Antim the Iberian and Patriarch Athanasios III Dabbās", *Georgian and European World Philosophical-Cultural Dialogue*, II, Tbilisi, 2019, p. 61–76.

18 E. Taqaishvili, *Katalikoz-Bakariani by Priest Yese Tlashadze*, Tbilisi, 1907; Y. Tlashadze, *Bakariani*, Tbilisi, 1962.

paid to the history of Vakhtang's brother, Prince Domenti, catholicos-patriarch of Georgia (1705–1714). The author mentions his journeys to various countries and cities: Russia, Iran, the Ottoman Empire, Wallachia, Bugdan (Moldavia, in present-day Romania), and Jerusalem.¹⁹

There is no doubt that when coming to Wallachia the Catholicos Domenti would get acquainted with his famous countryman, and it is likely that their meeting could help fulfill the long-standing dream of the royal family to open a printing press in Tbilisi. Antim the Iberian asked Constantin Brâncoveanu for help for the Georgians, for which he received the consent of the ruler of Wallachia. The meeting between Domenti and Antim the Iberian was first mentioned by Poliekvts Karbelashvili in 1699, as having taken place during the former's visit to Jerusalem. However, the presence of Antim the Iberian in Jerusalem at that time is not confirmed, and they probably met in Wallachia.²⁰

The negotiations of the Georgian royal family about the printing press were completed successfully, and Antim the Iberian sent to Tbilisi his most skilled disciple, Mihail Ishtvanovich (also known as Mihail Stepaneshvili, son of Stepane, or Ștefan), who was involved in printing many of the books at the Râmnic press. When it became imperative to establish an Orthodox printing press outside the borders of Wallachia, Mihail Ishtvanovich was assigned to carry out this mission.²¹ Various dates have been proposed for his arrival in Georgia. The most acceptable seems to be the opinion of Shota Kurdglashvili that this happened around 1708, when he must have taken the shortest route from Constantinople to Tbilisi, visiting, on his way, the Patriarch of Jerusalem Chrysanthos Notaras in the Ottoman capital.²²

Apparently, Mihail Ishtvanovich brought to Georgia a printing press, paper, typographic tools, a set of Nuskha-Khutsuri type,²³ probably Greek type as well, and ready-made woodblocks for the artistic decoration of books. Scholars also assume that Antim the Iberian had already created the Nuskha-Khutsuri and Asomtavruli series of type in Wallachia, assisted by Mihail Ishtvanovich. Later, in Tbilisi, Ishtvanovich supervised the manufacture of small type of the Nuskha-Khutsuri and Asomtavruli scripts, and part of the typefaces of the Mkhedruli script, previously unknown to him.²⁴

¹⁹ Taqaishvili, *Katalikoz-Bakariani*, p. 32-34, 47.

²⁰ P. Karbelashvili, *Ierarkia Sakartvelos Eklesiisa. Katolokozni da Mghvdelmtavarni*, Tbilisi, 1900, p. 131–132; O. Gvinchidze, *Antim Ivereli*, p. 194–196.

²¹ Gvinchidze, *Antim Ivereli*, p. 210.

²² Kurdghelashvili, *Kartuli Stambis*, p. 45.

²³ E. Machavariani, *Kartuli Anbani (Georgian Alphabets)*, Tbilisi, 1977.

²⁴ Kurdghelashvili, *Kartuli Stambis*, p. 53.

It is worth reminding here that there are three writing systems in the Georgian language: Asomtavruli, Nuskha-Khutsuri, and Mkhedruli. Among them, Asomtavruli is the oldest form of writing (it is also known as Mrglovani, due to its round outline) and was widespread in the 5th–10th centuries. The next stage of writing was Nuskha-Khutsuri. This system extended into the 10th – 11th centuries (the first specimen can be seen in the 9th century). In manuscripts copied in Nuskha-Khutsuri, initials and titles were still completed with Asomtavruli. The Nuskha-Khutsuri script was used until the 19th century, mostly in religious literature. Mkhedruli is a type of modern Georgian script. However, the first occurrences are found starting in the 10th – 11th centuries, while from the 14th century, the Mkhedruli script spread and was used mainly in documents and secular activities.

Vakhtang was prepared for the arrival of Mihail Ishtvanovich. He had built a special ten-room apartment for the printing press near the royal palace, on the right bank of the Mtkvari River, between the Anchiskhati and the Sioni Churches.²⁵ During its brief existence from 1709 to 1722, the Tbilisi press printed 20 titles, both religious and secular works. The number of copies of these books is unknown. Ishtvanovich's arrival to Georgia was of particular importance, as he taught printing and publishing techniques and trained Georgian typographers who continued this work after his departure. Ishtvanovich remained in Georgia from 1708 to 1711. His name is no longer mentioned in the 1712 edition of *The Knight in the Panther's Skin*.

The books published by the first press in Georgia are printed on high quality paper, some with watermarks. The character of the text, its layout, the harmonious combination of type of different sizes, refined ornaments, initial letters, the use of Asomtavruli, Nuskha-Khutsuri, and Mkhedruli fonts, engravings inserted in the printed text, headpieces and other decorative elements make these books unique. The outstanding bindings of the printed books were probably made locally. Books left the printing press already bound and, sometimes, enclosed in a leather case.

It is no longer disputed that the fonts and the entire artistic decoration and technical features of the books of Vakhtang's printing press were of such a high quality that they became an unattainable ideal of the Georgian printing presses in the second half of the 18th century, both in Georgia and in Russia.²⁶

Between 1709 and 1722, during its thirteen years of existence, Vakhtang's press printed twelve different titles, many in several successive editions (see Table 1).

25 P. Ioseliani, *Описание древностей г. Тифлиса*, Tbilisi, 1866, p. 247; T. Zhordania, *Kartl-Kakhetis monastrebisa da eklesiebis istoriuli sabutebi*, Poti, 1903, p. 98–99, 103.

26 *Kartuli Tsigni*, Tbilisi, 1941, p. IX.

Of the greatest value are the colophons of printed books and long texts listing the names and works of the typographers and other persons mentioned.

The first book, printed in 1709, was the Gospel (Tetraevangelion), as stated on the title page.

სამდთო და სამდდელო სახარება. აწ ახალი და პირველი დაბეჭდილი ქართულს ენაზედა. ჟამსა ამაღლებულისა და სახელოვანისა საქართველოს მეფისა უფლისა, უფლისა გიორგისა, იესიან დავითიან სოლომონიანისსა. შრომითა ფრიადითა და წარგებითა საფასეთათა მართლმადიდებლისა და განათლებულისა საქართველოს განმგებლისა, ბატონიშვილისა, თვით უფლისა ვახტანგ ლევანის ძისათა. გაიმართა წმიდაჲ ესე ჴელითა ნიკოლოზ მღვდელ-მონაზონისა ორბელის შვილისათა. ჴელითა მესტამბე მიხაილ სტეფანე შვილისა, უნგროვლახელისა. ქალაქსა ტფილისისასა. ქორონიკონსა ქრისტეს აქეთ ათას შვიდას და ცხრას.

The Divine and Priestly Gospel. The new and first printed book in the Georgian language. In honor of the exalted and illustrious King of Georgia, Lord Giorgi, whose forefather was Yese David Solomon. With the labor and donation of the great and most learned ruler of Georgia, Prince Vakhtang, son of Levan himself. Edited by the Hieromonk Nikoloz, son of Orbeli. By the hands of the typographer Mihail, son of Stepane [Stepaneshvili] from Ungro-Wallachia [...], in the city of Tiflis. The *choronicon* [year]²⁷ was one thousand seven hundred and nine AD.²⁸

The title page is followed by Vakhtang's colophon:

სადიდებლად წმიდისა სამებისა. მე, გვარტომობით, ძირმოდგმით დავითიანმან. ძის ძემან სახელგანთქმულის მეფის ვახტანგისამან. ძმისწულმან ქებულის მეფის არჩილისამან და დიდად სახელოვანის ქართველთა მეფისა გიორგისამან და ძემან დიდად პატიოსნისა ლევანისამან და განმგებელმან ქართლისამან. ბატონიშვილმა ვახტანგ, მოვიყვანე მესტამბე ვლახეთით და გავაკეთე სტამბა საჯსრად სულთა წინა თქმულთა მეფეთა და მამისა და დედისა ჩემისა.

In praise of the Holy Trinity. I, by birth, have descended from David. Son of the son of the famous King Vakhtang. The nephew of the praiseworthy King Archil and the great illustrious King of the Georgians Giorgi and the son of the great and honored Levan and the governor of Kartli. I, Prince Vakhtang, invited a printer from Wallachia and founded a printing press to the memory of the souls of the aforementioned kings and of my father and mother [...].²⁹

²⁷ Name of the calendar system in Georgia < Gr. *χρονος* (*chronos*).

²⁸ Matchaidze (ed.), *Vakhtang VI Stambis*, p. 9.

²⁹ Matchaidze (ed.), *Vakhtang VI Stambis*, p. 9.

Mihail Ștefan, or Iștvanovici (the names he went by in Wallachia), was named in the colophons of the Tbilisi books “Stepane Shvili”, i.e., “son of Stepane (Ștefan)”. In Georgian, the surname is read as one word, “Stepaneshvili”.

After the colophon of the governor of Kartli, an appeal of the printer, Mihail from Ungro-Wallachia, was placed in the book:

ყოველთა მკითხველთა გიხაროდენ! პირველად მიზეზი უცხოთა ამის საქმისა და ძალითა მღთისათა უცონელად შემასრულებელი სტამბისა ამის, სამკვიდრებელსა თქვენსა, იქმნა კურთხევით ჳსენებული, განათლებული და გამგებელი საქართველოსა ბატონიშვილი და თვით პარტონი ვახტანგ, ღმრთისმოყვარენო და ყოვლად მშვენიერნო მკვიდრნო საქართველოსანო. ხოლო ყოველივე საქმენი, რაოდენნი იხილვებიან: ასონი, ორთანონი და ყოველნი საჯმარნი სტამბისა, დაწყებით სრულყოფამდი, მოქმედი და წინამძღოლი მე ვარ, უნდო მონა თქვენი. უწინარესად დავებჯდეთ ესე საღმრთო და სამღვდლო წმიდაჲ სახარება. სიმდაბლით გვედრებით თქვენ, ყოველთა დიდთა და მცირეთა: უკეთუ ცთომილი რაჲმე იხილოთ, სიტყვა ანუ ასო, ნუ გამქირდავთ, რამეთუ უცხო ვიყავ ქვეყანასა ამის და უსმენელი სიტყუათა თქვენთა და რომელნი ჩემნი მოწაფენი იყვნენ, ეგრეთვე გამოუცდელნი, საქმისა ამისა ჩემისა, ვითა მე ვიყავ ქართლის უნახავი, ეგრეთვე ჩემნი მოწაფენი სტამბის... მდაბალი ამათ მბეჭდავთაგან მეტსამბე მჭურვალთა გულითა ვმუშაკობ. მოსამსახურე თქვენი მიხაელ სტეფანეს შვილი უნგრეოვლახელი.

Rejoice, all readers! For the first time, the accomplishment of a new craft and the power of the good maker of the printing press, your heritage, were made possible with the blessing of the enlightened, scholarly ruler of Georgia and the lord himself, Prince Vakhtang, the God-fearing and all-praised by the people of Georgia. And all the works will be clearly seen: type, tools, typographic items, and the whole printing press, from the beginning to the end. I am the worker and the master, I am your servant. First, we have printed these divine and priestly Holy Gospels. I humbly beseech you, all great and small: if you see anything wrong, a word or a letter, do not blame me, for I am a stranger in this country and I have never heard your words, and those who were my disciples in this work of mine, so inexperienced, as I have never seen Kartli, so were my disciples in printing [...]. I am working with the hearts of humble typographers. Your servant Mihail, the son of Stepane [Stepaneshvili], from Ungro-Wallachia.³⁰

The text of the Gospel Book is preceded by a foreword by the editor Nikoloz Orbeliani, who states that he compared and corrected the Georgian text using a Greek version of the Gospels. This first Georgian printed book, along with elegant graphic art elements and the observance of Georgian bookmaking traditions, demonstrates an excellent level of typographic and printing techniques.

³⁰ Machaidze (ed.), *Vakhtang VI Stambis*, p. 9–10.

The grateful Vakhtang sent a copy of the first printed book to Constantin Brâncoveanu, the prince of Wallachia. The copy of the Gospels in the Library of the Romanian Academy in Bucharest (call number III 182739, CRV 157A) contains a handwritten note in Romanian by Antim the Iberian:

The Holy Book of the Divine Gospel, which is presented to his Highness, with reverence, O dear Lord, is the new fruit that the land of the Iberians, quenching its thirst from the munificence of your printing gifts, has born this year. Thus, this land has also had the fortune to be enriched with printing in its language” (p. [II]).³¹

On p. [IV]-[V] in the Georgian Gospel, before Antim’s dedicatory colophon, there is a 13-stanza ode that details the story of the setup of the printing press in Tbilisi. It describes Vakhtang’s request to the patriarch of Jerusalem for help in establishing a Georgian printing press, then Patriarch Chrysanthos’s request to his friend Constantin Brâncoveanu, the prince of Wallachia, to send a typographer to Georgia. Brâncoveanu sent Mihail Ishtvanovich, who first visited Patriarch Chrysanthos Notaras in Constantinople and then went to Georgia. The printing press in Tbilisi was established according to plan. It is worth mentioning here that during the visit of a Georgian delegation to Romania in 1951,³² the Georgian writer Giorgi Leonidze studied this book at the Library of the Romanian Academy and read this ode, writing about it upon his return to Georgia. In his opinion, this poem had to be attributed to Mihail Ishtvanovich and was probably composed in Tbilisi.³³

The first Georgian Gospel was printed in bold Nuskhuri type, with black ink only. It is a rather large format book, 23.5 x 15.5 cm. A *Deisis* composition is inserted in the frontispiece of the title page (Fig. 1). In the center, there is the half-length figure of the Savior, with the half-length images of the Virgin Mary and Saint John the Baptist left and right. Inside the medallions, on either side of the holy figures, there are inscriptions: for Christ – “Jesus Christ, have mercy on Vakhtang”, for the Mother of God – “All Holy, Have mercy on Vakhtang”, for Saint John the Baptist – “Baptist, Have mercy on Vakhtang”. A large area of the headpiece is filled with a floral ornament wrapped around the medallions. King Vakhtang’s title is placed

31 Leonidze, “Kartuli Erovnuli”, p. 18; Feodorov, *Arabic Printing for the Christians in Ottoman Lands*, p. 322.

32 In 1951, a Georgian delegation was invited to the celebration of the 100th anniversary of the birth of the Romanian poet Mihail Eminescu. They also visited the Romanian Academy and its Library, and surveyed the items related to Antim the Iberian that the Library holds to this day.

33 Leonidze, “Kartuli Erovnuli”, p. 18; see also https://dspace.nplg.gov.ge/bitstream/1234/7087/1/Antimoz_Iverieli_Samgvto_da_Samgvdelo.pdf (accessed August 11, 2024).

at the bottom of this page, separated from the title by a decorative border of small fleurons.

If we compare the first printed Georgian Gospels with the Romanian Gospel printed in Snagov in 1697, the similarity of the general structure and the iconographic themes of the engravings included in the design is obvious.³⁴ In the Snagov Gospels, the composition of the *Deisis* came with Greek inscriptions. The main distinguishing feature of this representation is that the Georgian book adopted the iconographic types of the Savior, the Mother of God, and Saint John the Baptist common in the Georgian art of the Middle Ages. The blessing Christ seen in the headpiece of the 1697 Gospel printed in Snagov has been replaced in the Georgian edition by a bust of Christ holding a codex in his left hand and blessing with his right. Parallels to the ornate floral decoration used as a background can be found in Georgian manuscripts of the late Middle Ages.

Similar headpieces are inserted at the beginning of each Gospel Book (p. 7, 71, 117, and 193). Engravings of the Four Evangelists are placed before the beginning of each text. Their iconography is like the portraits of the Evangelists included in Georgian manuscripts. The Evangelist Matthew (p. 6) is depicted against a complex architectural background. The Asomtavruli inscription runs along the edge of the frame: “Holy Apostle Matthew beg Christ to grant us forgiveness for our prayers and great mercy for our souls” (*Motsikulo tsmindao Mate evedre Kristes Ghmertsa, rata lotsvata shendoba mogvanitsos da sulta chuenta didi tskaloba*). The Holy Apostle Matthew is presented with a codex in his hand, sitting on his chair (Fig. 2). His symbol, an angel, appears in the background. The compositional and stylistic features of the engraving are rooted in local art.

Against the architectural and starry background, Mark the Evangelist (p. 70) is seated on a chair with an open codex and his symbol, the bull, beside him (Fig. 3). Whereas the icon of Matthew is completely covered with hatched lines, in the case of Mark, simpler architectural details are used and wider blank areas are left, which bring more light and clarity to the composition.

Luke the Evangelist, on the other hand (p. 116), is depicted in the process of writing, drawn against a background rich in architectural details (Fig. 4). In this case, we notice that the image of Luke shows the already established high artistic level of Georgian engravings.³⁵

The divinely inspired Saint John is depicted next to Prochorus (p. 192), against the background of the cave (Fig. 5). Among the Evangelists, the monumental figure

34 Chițulescu (coord. ed.), *Antim Ivireanul*, p. 52.

35 S. Kvashvadze, *Vakhtang VI Stambis Tsigni*, Tbilisi, 1952, p. 56.

of John is the most expressive. Thick plastic lines depict the massive forms of the body. This engraving shows an essentializing, almost abstract drawing.

The Evangelists' portraits in the Gospel show the hand of two masters. The first is conventionally called "the hand of the artist of John the Evangelist", and the second is "the hand of the artist of Saint Matthew".³⁶ The hand of the artist of the Evangelist Mark matches the hand of the artist of the Evangelist John, so, the two engravings are considered to be the work of the same artist.

At the end of the Gospel of Luke (p. 190), the figures of Saints Constantine and Helen, holding the Cross between them, are blessed by Christ, who comes out from the open Heavens (Fig. 6). One can wonder where the inclusion of this engraving among the Gospel illustrations comes from, as it was alien to Georgian book decoration. It is worth mentioning that Antim the Iberian dedicated a sermon to Saints Constantine and Helen, which was printed at Snagov in 1696 and included a woodcut of a similar type. The Georgian engravers obviously followed the Wallachian model. However, they replaced the Greek inscriptions there with Georgian texts in the Nuskhuri script.³⁷ It can be assumed that the printer Mihail Ishtvanovich had brought with him books printed in Wallachia and their ready-made woodcuts as well. Their use can be clearly traced in the first Georgian printed books.

A portrait of King Vakhtang is inserted in the 1709 Gospel Book, at the end of the text. Around the engraving there is an Asomtavruli inscription: "In praise of the Holy Trinity and the One Being, I, by lineage of David Solomon Pankration, the son of the righteous, the son of kings, the ruler of Kartli, Prince Vakhtang..." (*Madideblad Tsmindisa Samebisa da Ertarsebisa, Me, Gvartomobit Davitian Solomonian Pankrationi, dze, zitagan ketilovanta, dzis dze mefeta, gamgebeli kartli-batonishvili Vakhtang...*).³⁸

The ruler of Kartli, depicted facing front under the eastern triple arch, is represented on the royal throne, holding a cross (Fig. 7). Behind Vakhtang is the figure of a young man with a sword in his hand. The blank space in front of the king is filled with a plant growing in a pot. The king wears a brocade and fur jacket. The linear rhythm, the well-constructed arched frame and the striking resemblance of the figures suggest that the engraving was created by analogy with the portrait of Vakhtang's uncle, King Archil (Fig. 8), in an 18th-century manuscript that contains

³⁶ Kvashvadze, *Vakhtang VI Stambis*, p. 54.

³⁷ Chițulescu (coord. ed.), *Antim Ivireanul*, p. 205.

³⁸ N. Targamadze, "Vakhtang VI Portretis Interpretatsiisatvis", *Mtsignobari*, 10, 2010, p. 100.

the rhymed literary works of this ruler and Iranian translated texts of Vakhtang VI, copied by Ose Gabashvili.³⁹

There was a disagreement, for a long time, about the identity of the figure depicted behind the king. According to recent studies, the young man is Bakar, the son of Vakhtang, represented behind the king as heir to the throne. The note “Here is presented Bakar” is written on a manuscript copy preserved at the National Center of Manuscripts in Tbilisi.⁴⁰ It is noteworthy that the shape of the letters, their arrangement, the architecture in general confirm the hand of a skilled typographer.

According to early historiography, the establishment of the Tbilisi printing press was believed to be the outcome of negotiations between Antim the Iberian and the Georgians. Zakaria Chichinadze claims that Antim the Iberian created the Georgian fonts in Wallachia and sent samples to Georgia for approval. The Georgians were impressed with the samples and requested the services of a skilled master and a printing press. Thus, Zakaria Chichinadze emphasizes that the credit for opening the printing press belongs directly to Antim and not to anyone else.⁴¹

A separate issue is the use and rendering of the initial letters. As Shota Kvashvadze points out,⁴² there are two types of engraving rules for initial letters: 1) Raising the silhouette, outline, contour of the image and deepening the background; and 2) Deepening the image and a smooth background. The letters are always written in a rectangle. Often there are details characteristic of manuscript illumination, when the configuration of the initial letter is presented in the form of a compound initial.

The design and layout of the Georgian Gospel are based on the books printed by Antim the Iberian in Snagov. Nevertheless, the iconographic models used by the engravers are reminiscent of medieval Georgian art (e.g., the *Deisis* and the portraits of the Four Evangelists). It is important to note that parallel to book printing, calligraphy schools continued to flourish, and it was due to them that engravings inserted into the Georgian printed books were created.

The book of the *Acts of the Apostles*, published in 1709, is notable for being the first edition of Vakhtang's printing press to use two colors of ink. The title page features the traditional *Deisis* headpiece, as well as the colophon of King Vakhtang that had already been used in the Gospel. For the first time, the coat of

39 MS NCM S-395 in the collection of the Korneli Kekelidze Georgian National Center of Manuscripts, f. 89r. See E. Metreveli (ed.), *Description of Georgian Manuscripts, S-Collection*, vol. I, Tbilisi, 1960, p. 493–497.

40 Targamadze, “Vakhtang VI Portretis”, p. 104.

41 Z. Chichinadze, *Kartuli Stamba da Vakhtang VI*, Tbilisi, 1909, p. 59. This note was sent to Zakaria Chichinadze by Michael Tamarashvili.

42 Kvashvadze, *Vakhtang VI Stambis*, p. 120.

arms of the Bagrationi family appears on the title page of the *Acts of the Apostles*, in its single-lion version, accompanied by the inscriptions: “By the grace of God, David, Pankration King Giorgi of all Georgia” (*Tskalobita Gmrtisita Davitian, Pankration Mepe Giorgi kovlisa Sakartveloisa*), “King David’s Harp” (*Davitis Knari*), “David’s Slingshot” (*Davitis Shurduli*), and “Christ’s tunic” (*Kristes Kvarti*). On the same page, below the image, there is a poem explaining the symbolism of the coat of arms. According to Akaki Shanidze, placing the coat of arms in the books of Vakhtang’s printing press was a choice determined by the influence of the Wallachian printed books.⁴³

The book of the *Acts of the Apostles* contains several other engravings: 1) *Pentecost* (p. 4) (Fig. 9); 2) The portrait of *the Holy Apostle Paul* (p. 78), where the inscription “By the hand of the sinful archdeacon Markoz” (*Khelita chem tsodvili mtavardiakon Markozisata*) can be seen next to him; 3) *The Holy Apostle Jacob* (p. 249); 4) *The Holy Apostle Peter* (p. 259); 5) *The Holy Apostle John* (p. 275); 6) *The Holy Apostle Judas* (p. 287); 7) The portrait of *King Vakhtang* (p. 422), which is identical to the one printed in the Gospel. In terms of style, these engravings reflect the influence of medieval Georgian artistic traditions.

At the end of the book, a typographer’s note is present: “It was printed in the city of Tiflis (Tbilisi), by the hand of the typographer Mihail, son of Stepane, from Ungro-Wallachia. The *choronicon* was one thousand seven hundred and nine AD” (*Daibecheda kalaksa Tflisisasa, khelita mestambe Mikhail Stepane Shvilisa Ungrovlakhelisa. Koronikonsa Kristes aket atas shvidas da tskhrasa*) (p. 421).

The 1709 edition of the Psalter is devoid of decoration. A characteristic feature of the book is its small size (12.2 x 7 cm), which does not fully agree with the large type used in it. Only one copy of this book survives, preserved today at the library of the Ivane Javakhishvili State University in Tbilisi.

The large typeface used for the books printed in 1709 seems to have been changed in 1710, which reveals a diversification of typefaces by this time. In 1710, the editorial program of the press was extended to include new titles. The Liturgikon (*Kondaki*) was printed in two ink colors, red and black. On the title page, next to the portrait of Prince Vakhtang, it is mentioned that “it was held by the hand of Germane, the priest-monk, by the hand of the printer Mihail, son of Stepane (Stepaneshvili), from Ungro-Wallachia. Tiflis (Tbilisi), 1710 AD” (*Gaimarta khelita Germane mghvdel-monazonisata. Khelita mestambe Mikhail Stepaneshvilisa ungrovlakhelisa, kalaksa Tflisisasa, Kristes aket 1710*). The title page also features an ornate frame containing an explanation of the contents of the Liturgikon and the place and date of its printing.

43 Shanidze, “Kartuli Stambis”, p. 157.

The traditional coat of arms of the Bagrationi family (the two-lion version), the explanation of its symbolism, Vakhtang's colophon, and the introduction of the printer Mihail Ishtvanovich were transferred here unchanged. The typographer's colophon in the Liturgikon is followed by a Greek inscription. It is assumed that the Greek font was brought from Wallachia by Ishtvanovich. This edition of the Liturgikon is also interesting in that it contains a Romanian poem presumably composed by Ishtvanovich and printed in Mkhedruli type. Vakhtang's portrait is a notable feature of the enduring design found in Georgian printed books. However, a new, different version of it was used in the Liturgikon. The king is shown facing the reader and is surrounded by an oval frame. The inscription, which runs along the frame, reveals decorative qualities. The insertion of the king's portrait in royal attire comes from the Georgian tradition and should be connected with the 16th – 18th-century portraits of rulers. This also reflects the influence of secular art.

The following full-page engravings were inserted in the Liturgikon: 1) *The Pentecost*, whose composition is akin to a similar scene included in the Acts. The characters are slightly disproportionate and rough, drawn with large strokes; 2) *Christ Blessing*, a full-page icon of the Savior, with Greek inscriptions (Fig. 10); 3) *The Crucifixion*, where the Greek signature IO can be seen, which probably indicates its non-Georgian origin;⁴⁴ 4) *Saint John Chrysostom*, an engraving whose creator is Georgian, as he signed his name as “archdeacon Markoz”. This character could be the engraver who worked on the *Acts of the Apostles* and at the same time the author of the Liturgikon engraving.⁴⁵ 5) *Saint Basil the Great*, who holds a scroll filled with Asomtavruli-script text; 6) *Saint Gregory the Theologian*.

The icons of the holy fathers are outstanding in their simplicity and do not comprise the rich decorations and background typical of similar compositions in Romanian books.⁴⁶ However, we should note that the engravings of the Liturgikon still bear a great resemblance to the compositions contained in the books printed in Wallachia (in particular, the *Crucifixion* and *Christ Blessing*). The image of the *Crucifixion* (Fig. 11) is an exact copy of the engraving included in the Euchologion printed in 1706 at Râmnic (Fig. 12).⁴⁷

A Book of Prayers (*Lotsvani*) was also printed in 1710. The printing of this text in Nuskha-Khutsuri and Mkhedruli type was an important event for that time. The regular elements were presented at the beginning of the book: title page, the Bagrationis' coat of arms, Vakhtang's colophon, publishing data. The decoration

⁴⁴ Kvashvadze, *Vakhtang VI Stambis*, p. 110.

⁴⁵ Kvashvadze, *Vakhtang VI Stambis*, p. 114.

⁴⁶ Chițulescu (coord. ed.), *Antim Ivireanul*, p. 176.

⁴⁷ Chițulescu (coord. ed.), *Antim Ivireanul*, p. 142.

includes only a few engravings: 1) *The Savior*, which looks like the woodblock was not of Georgian provenance but could have been brought by Mihail Ishtvanovich from Wallachia; 2) *The Presentation of the Holy Virgin at the Temple*, with Georgian inscriptions; 3) *The Inexhaustible Chalice* (Fig. 13). At first glance, it seems that there are no inscriptions on the image, but at close inspection, certain Georgian letters appear to be scattered all over the frame. The mirror reading revealed a phrase uttered by the Savior at the Last Supper: “Drink ye all of you” (*Matthew* 26:27),⁴⁸ which is associated with the Eucharist. Therefore, placing this image before the prayer for communion is not accidental. The same arrangement is present in Romanian books (e.g., *Akathistos*, Snagov, 1698; *Greek-Arabic Liturgikon*, Snagov, 1701; *Book of Hours*, Târgoviște, 1715).⁴⁹

The Georgian Horologion printed in 1710 contains the largest number of engravings, 21, in addition to the portrait of Prince Vakhtang: 1) *The Holy Trinity*, with the Georgian inscription “God is the Lord of all”; 2) *Nativity of the Holy Virgin*; 3) *Elevation of the Holy Cross*; 4) *Presentation of the Holy Virgin at the Temple*; 5) *Nativity of the Lord*; 6) *Epiphany*; 7) *Presentation of Jesus at the Temple*; 8) *Annunciation*; 9) *Transfiguration*; 10) *Dormition of the Mother of God*; 11) *The Raising of Lazarus*; 12) *Entry into Jerusalem*; 13) *The Last Supper*; 14) *The Crucifixion*; 15) *The Deposition*; 16) *The Resurrection*; 17) *The Incredulity of Tomas*; 18) *Communion*; 19) *The Ascension*; 20) *The Pentecost*; 21) *The Choir of All Saints*.

The Horologion illustrations reveal the directions in the development of Georgian engraving art and the local masters’ bold involvement in it. The participation of Georgian masters becomes even more evident when we compare the engravings with miniatures in Georgian manuscripts of the 17th and 18th centuries (MS A-30, A-31, A-32, 1681; MS H-1755, 17th – 18th centuries; MS A-619, 17th century; MS H-342, 1661, all held by the National Center of Manuscripts in Tbilisi). Their artistic and stylistic resemblance is obvious. It should also be considered that the existence of various artistic workshops and calligraphic schools that worked in various fields of fine arts, including miniature and fresco, is attested in the 17th and 18th centuries in Kartli.⁵⁰ Thus, it is possible that the masters of these workshops also tried their hand in the art of engravings for book printing, which was completely new to them.

An original didactic, catechism-like Georgian work, comprising the knowledge of the basic doctrines of Christianity, would only be printed in 1711: *Teaching on how to Preach to a Disciple* (*Stsavla tu vitar martebz modzgvarsa stsavleba*), authored

48 Machaidze (ed.), *Vakhtang VI Stambis*, p. 53.

49 Chițulescu (coord. ed.), *Antim Ivireanul*, p. 66, 94, 193.

50 F. Devdariani, *Миниатюры Анчисхатского Гулани*, Tbilisi, 1990, p. 94.

by the hieromonk Germane. The decoration of the book consists only of an ornamental setting. A traditional title page, the Bagrationi family's coat of arms, king Vakhtang's colophon, the author's note, and an epilogue are included in the book.

The same year, the Psalter was printed in Mkhedruli type, with passages in Nuskha-Khutsuri and Greek type. It is important to note that King Kaikhosro, Vakhtang's brother, is mentioned along with him on the title page. At the same time, next to Mihail, the son of Stepane, from Ungro-Wallachia, another printer is mentioned: "[The Psalter] was achieved by the hands of Gabriel, son of the archpriest of the church of Sioni". It is clear from this book that Mihail Ishtvanovich, who was probably preparing to leave Georgia, had a disciple and a successor.

The Psalms are preceded by a poem in Greek dedicated to the biblical King David.⁵¹ This edition contains a variety of ornamental frames, headpieces and tailpieces. The illustrations of the Psalter include the Bagrationi family's coat of arms, a portrait of Prophet David, and a portrait of King Vakhtang at the end of the text. The image of David repeats the illustration from the Psalter printed in Romanian at Bucharest in 1694⁵² and the engraving of King David in the Greek Psalter printed at Snagov in 1700 (Fig. 14).⁵³ King David is represented in the process of writing, placed in an elliptical frame. The oval shape is surrounded by a square one (Fig. 15). The composition is quite rich in details. The Greek and Romanian inscriptions were replaced by Asomtavruli script.

In the books published in 1712, the name of Mihail son of Stepane of Ungro-Wallachia does not occur at all. In the Psalter published that year only the name "Mikel, son of the archpriest of the royal court" is mentioned. The structure and illustrations of the book repeat the editions of previous years.

The first secular book printed in Vakhtang's press was *The Knight in the Panther's Skin*, the greatest and most famous literary text of Georgian medieval literature, a real saga of the people of Georgia. It must have been a great event for the society of that time. A lot of preparatory work preceded the printing of the poem, and a particularly significant fact is the edition of the text by Vakhtang himself: a letter confirming this was included in the printed book. The book contains the traditional title page, the coat of arms (Fig. 16) and a poem explaining its symbolism, Vakhtang's colophon, his portrait (Fig. 17), the typographer's poem (where only Mikel is mentioned), and Vakhtang's interpretation of the saga. There are no illustrations within the text.

51 K. Sharashidze, *Pirveli Stamba*, p. 139.

52 Chițulescu (coord. ed.), *Antim Ivireanul*, p. 47.

53 Chițulescu (coord. ed.), *Antim Ivireanul*, p. 76.

The Euchologion was printed in 1713. On the title page, the name of the printer Mikel, son of the archpriest of the royal court, is still present. The text itself was edited and prepared for publication by Cyprian, Bishop of Samtavisi. The surname of the typographer Mikel, son of the archpriest and a member of the Mikadze literati family, has been established.⁵⁴ No new engravings were created for this book, but the illustrations from the Horologion printed in 1710 were re-used: *The Holy Trinity* and an icon of *All Saints*, which are probably not of Georgian origin.

In 1717, the Horologion was printed, repeating the 1710 edition; the order and number of engravings included in the text remained unchanged, 21. The text on the title page was changed: Prince Bakar, Vakhtang's son, is mentioned next to King Vakhtang. It is also indicated that the book was "printed by the hand of the typographer Garsevan, formerly, priest Gabriel". The indication of the printer repeats the one of Mihail Ishtvanovich; only the king's and the printer's names were changed. In this edition of the Horologion is mentioned the name of the artist Giorgi, who called himself in the Octoechos published in 1720: "Giorgi, artist of the Sioni Church in Tbilisi".

The Octoechos (or Parakletike) was printed by the order and at the expense of Prince Bakar. In addition to the customary texts, the coat of arms, and the portrait of King Vakhtang, several engravings were included in the Octoechos: 1) *The Holy Trinity*; 2) the same *Deesis* as in the Gospel Book of 1709 and the Bible of 1710–1711, but in a new version, rougher and more angular than the first. It is assumed that the woodcut of this second *Deesis* was created in Georgia. Thus, a completely new icon appears in the Octoechos, in addition to the portraits of the first Georgian saints, or "enlighteners" (the first preachers of Christianity), and Saint George, the holy patron of Georgia. In the headpiece there are half-figures of Saint Nino, the Holy Virgin Mary with the Child Jesus, and Saint Andrew the First-Called. The Asomtavruli inscriptions still address Vakhtang and ask the saints to bless him.

Thus, the emphasis on the national idea and the depiction of the first preachers of Christianity in Georgia confirm the local origin of this book and its production in a workshop of Georgian engravers. This opinion is supported by the style of the two new triptychs in the Octoechos, the second version of the *Deesis* and the *Georgian Saints*, which represent the work of a Georgian master. The somewhat coarse, angular, accentuated, and rough drawing is its characteristic feature. On the one hand, the engravings of the Octoechos show their connection to Georgian art, on the other, they introduce artistic and iconographic innovations.

One of the last books printed in King Vakhtang's press was the *Book on the Knowledge of the Creation of Celestial Bodies* (*Kmnulebis Tsodnis Tsigni*), also known as *Aiati* in Georgian, an astronomical treatise that the king had translated from

⁵⁴ Ioseliani, *Kartuli Mtsignobrobis*, p. 203.

Persian. The text was edited by the bishop of Ruisi, Nikoloz Orbeliani. Probably due to the difficult situation in the country, it was not possible to create and include engravings in the book, so, their intended places remained blank.

The books printed in 1719–1722 show a different artistic style of decoration from the earlier editions, which confirms the existence of a new engraving workshop.⁵⁵

Vakhtang was forced to leave for Russia in 1724, after the invasion of Tbilisi, first by the Ottomans, and then by the Persians in 1723. It was an unfavorable time for printing Georgian books, and Vakhtang's press was destroyed. The building was demolished and the printing implements were vandalized. The restoration of book printing in Tbilisi became possible only in 1749. However, it did not match Vakhtang's printing press in terms of quality and scale of activity.

An important fact is that the books published under the supervision of Mihail Ishtvanovich are characterized by their diversity. The structure of the artistic elements of the books printed in Wallachia are preserved in them, as well as the use of similar engravings. However, one can see the amazing capacity of Georgian masters to become skilled in the art of book printing and engraving. It is significant that Ishtvanovich's name does not appear in printed books after 1711. Still, he had by then essentially contributed to the establishment of a typographic base in Georgia and the training of Georgian typographers.

At Vakhtang's printing press in Tbilisi, 20 Georgian books were printed. Their initial print run is unknown. The remaining copies are preserved today at the Korneli Kekelidze National Centre of Manuscripts, the National Parliamentary Library of Georgia, the Kutaisi Historical-Ethnographic Museum, the Tbilisi Museum, the Library of Ivane Javakhishvili State University in Tbilisi, the Giorgi Leonidze Museum of Georgian Literature, the National Archives, private collections, and various libraries in Russia and Europe. The National Centre of Manuscripts collection of early printed books is outstanding in its richness. The Centre (formerly the Institute of Manuscripts, until 2008) was established in 1958, when the Manuscripts Department was separated from the State Museum and formed an independent scholarly center. The National Centre of Manuscripts received the collections that existed in Georgia before February 1921,⁵⁶ including those of the Ecclesiastical Museum (A-collection), the Society for the Dissemination of Literacy among Georgians (S-collection), the Historical-Ethnographic Society (H-collection), the new collection (Q-collection), rare books collections, as well as a corpus of historical documents and archival material.

⁵⁵ Kvashvadze, *Vakhtang VI Stambis*, p. 173.

⁵⁶ Part of this large collection was transferred to France in 1921, and its return to Georgia became possible only in 1945. The Centre holds almost all the books printed at Tbilisi in 1709–1722.

Where did Mihail Ishtvanovich go when leaving Georgia? One of the reasons ventured for Ishtvanovich's departure from Tbilisi was a disagreement with King Vakhtang.⁵⁷ The true reason, however, is revealed by the correspondence between Antim the Iberian and the Patriarch Chrysanthos Notaras. In a letter from Râmnic, Antim writes to the Patriarch: "Today, it will be one year since our disciple Mihail left Iberia, and as I learned, he had a very difficult journey to the capital [of Wallachia], but by the grace of God and your prayers, he arrived safely. Wishing to acquire greater knowledge, he has travelled to Holland. But we do not know how long he will stay there".⁵⁸ Mihail Ishtvanovich's departure from Georgia coincided with Vakhtang's leave for the Shah's court in Isfahan in 1712, where the latter would remain until 1716 (perhaps this was one of the reasons why the Wallachian printer left Georgia so urgently).

Vakhtang VI was able to establish the first Georgian printing press and properly control its activities against the background of a difficult political situation. He was supported by Antim the Iberian, the Patriarch Chrysanthos of Jerusalem, the Wallachian prince Constantin Brâncoveanu, and the printer Mihail Ishtvanovich, who contributed to the development of a Georgian school of book engravings. After he left Georgia, his work was continued by his disciples. The Tbilisi printing press drew on the artistic traditions of the Georgian monastic scriptoria and the various schools of calligraphy active at the time. Antim the Iberian's achievements and the expertise of printing art in Walachia in his time were crucial for the establishment of the first Tbilisi printing press.

Tab. 1: Books Printed in Tbilisi in 1709-1721

Year	Book Title/Description	Re-editions	Type (Script)
1709	<i>Samghto da Samghdelo Sakhareba</i> (The Divine and Priestly Gospel Book), 302 p., 26.5 x 18.5 cm		Nuskha-Khutsuri
1709	<i>Davitni</i> (Psalter), 295 p., 13 x 9 cm	2 nd ed., 1711 3 rd ed., 1712 4 th ed., 1716	1 st ed., Nuskha-Khutsuri 2 nd ed., Mkhedruli 3 rd and 4 th eds., Nuskha-Khutsuri
1709	<i>Samghto da Samghdelo Samotsikulo</i> (The Divine and Priestly Acts of the Apostles), 442 p., 27 x 19 cm		Nuskha-Khutsuri

⁵⁷ Karitchashvili, *Kartuli Tsignis*, p. 71.

⁵⁸ BRV I, p. 342.

Tab. 1: Books Printed in Tbilisi in 1709-1721 (continued).

Year	Book Title/Description	Re-editions	Type (Script)
1710	<i>Kondaki</i> (Liturgikon), 210 p., 20 x 16 cm		Nuskha-Khutsuri and Mkhedruli (less often)
1710	<i>Zhamni</i> (Horologion), 421 p., 12 x 8 cm	2 nd ed., 1710 3 rd ed., 1717 4 th ed., 1722	2 nd and 3 rd eds., Mkhedruli 4 th ed., Mkhedruli
1710	<i>Lotsvani</i> (Book of Prayers), 290 p., 13 x 9 cm	2 nd ed., 1717	Nuskha-Khutsuri
1710–1711	<i>Biblia</i> : separate books of the <i>Profecies</i> and the Gospel, 404 p., 26.5 x 18.5 cm		Nuskha-Khutsuri
1711	<i>Stsavla tu vitar martebis modz- varsa stsavleba motsapis-Germane</i> <i>Mghvdelmonazoni</i> (Teaching on how to Preach to a Disciple by Hieromonk Germane), 411 p., 13 x 10 cm		Mkhedruli
1712	<i>Vepkhistsqaosani</i> (The Knight in the Panther's Skin), 351 p., 29 x 19 cm		Mkhedruli
1713	<i>Kurtkhevani</i> (Euchologion), 627 p., 20 x 15 cm	2 nd ed., 1719–1720	Nuskha-Khutsuri
1720	<i>Paraklitoni</i> (Octoechos), 453 p., 30 x 19 cm		Nuskha-Khutsuri
1721	<i>Kmnulebis Tsodnis Tsigni</i> (Book on the Astronomical Knowledge), 148 p., 21 x 15 cm		Mkhedruli



Fig. 2: Beginning of the Gospel of Matthew the Evangelist with his icon, Gospel, Tbilisi, 1709, p. 6.

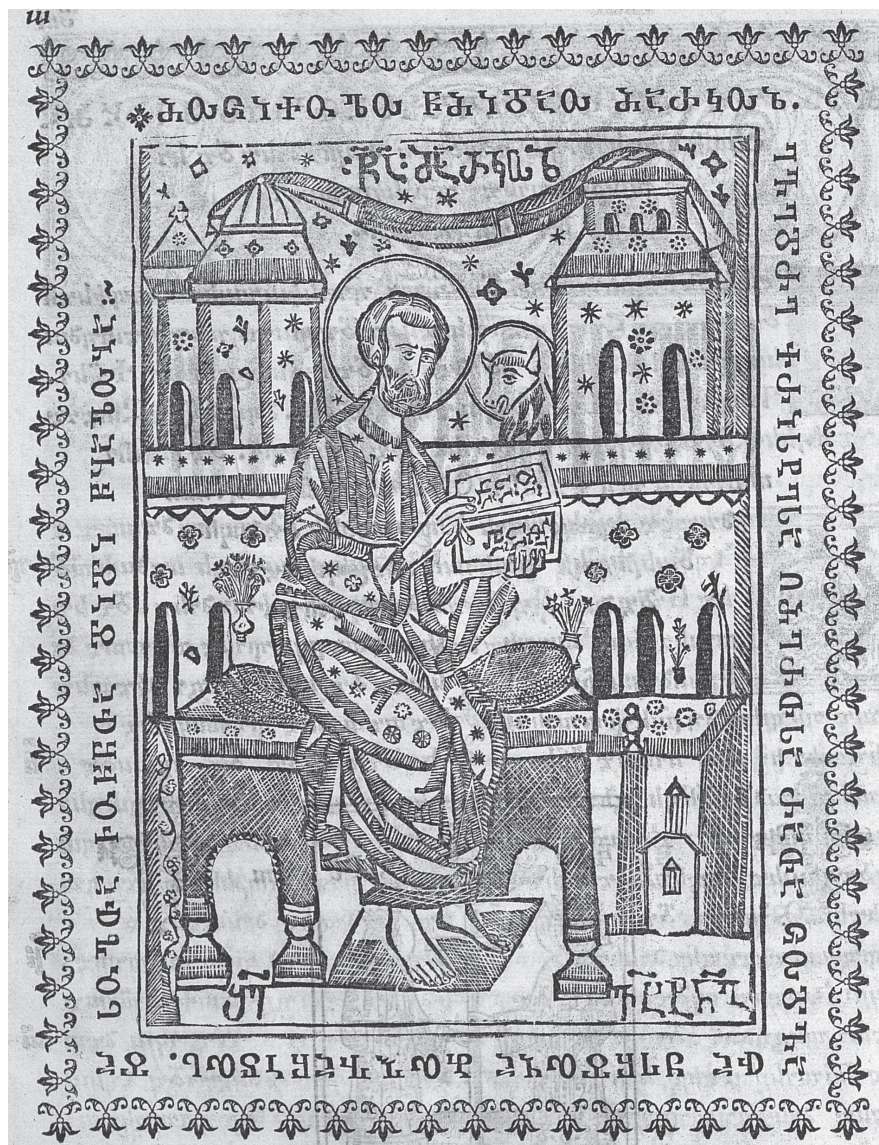


Fig. 3: Beginning of the Gospel of Mark the Evangelist with his icon, Gospel, Tbilisi, 1709, p. 70.



Fig. 4: *Luke the Evangelist*, Gospel, Tbilisi, 1709, p. 116.





Fig. 7: King Vakhtang VI, Gospel, Tbilisi, 1709, p. 300.



Fig. 8: *King Archil II*, MS NCM S-395, Collection of the 18th c., Center of Manuscripts, Tbilisi, f. 89r.



Fig. 9: *The Pentecost, Acts of the Apostles*, Tbilisi, 1709, p. 4.

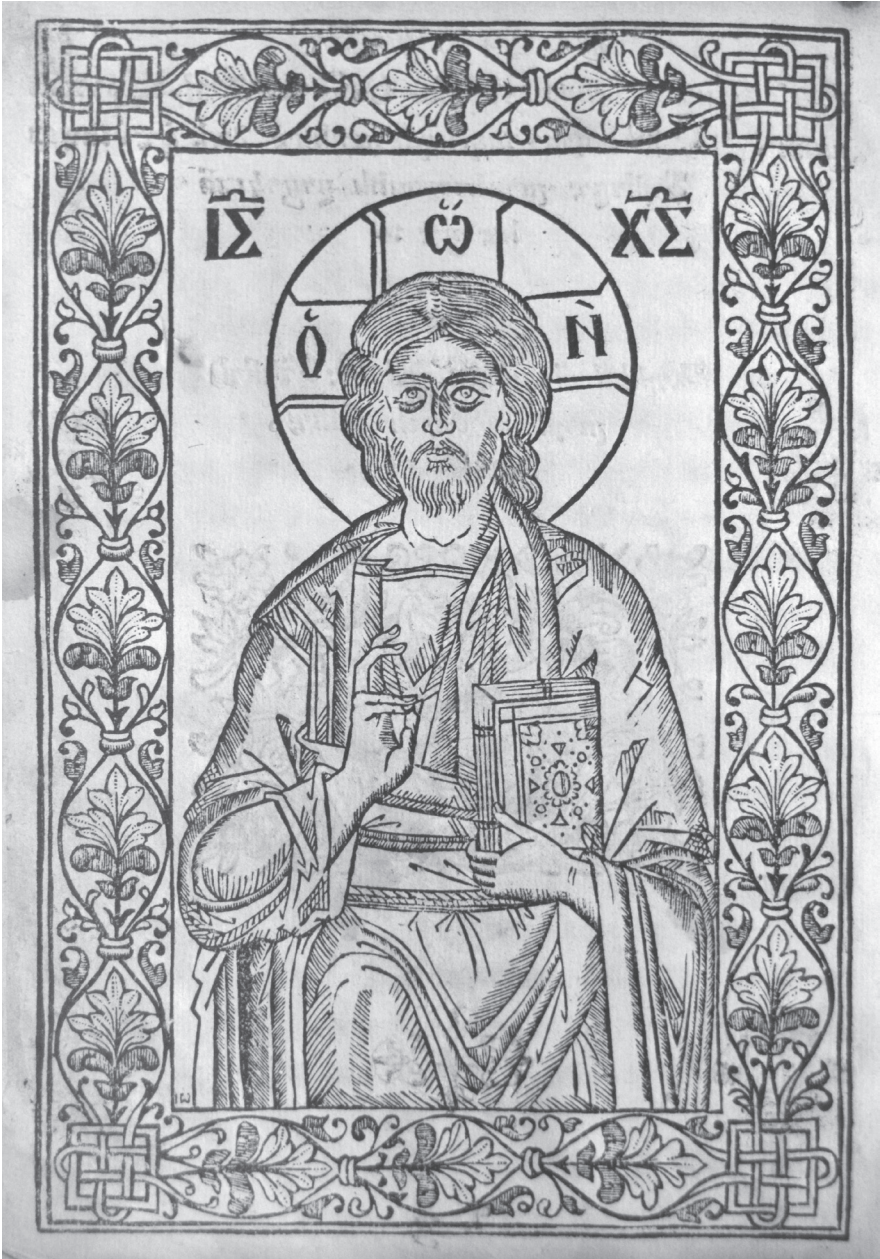


Fig. 10: *Christ Blessing*, Liturgikon, 1710, Tbilisi, p. 22.



Fig. 11: *Crucifixion*, Liturgikon, Tbilisi, 1710, p. 60.



Fig. 12: *Crucifixion*, Euchologion, 1706, p. 12 (cf. Archim. Policarp Chițulescu (coord. ed.), *Antim Ivireanul. Opera tipografică*, Bucharest: Editura Institutului Cultural Român, 2016, p. 142).



Fig. 13: *The Inexhaustible Chalice*, Book of Prayers, Tbilisi, 1710, p. 259.

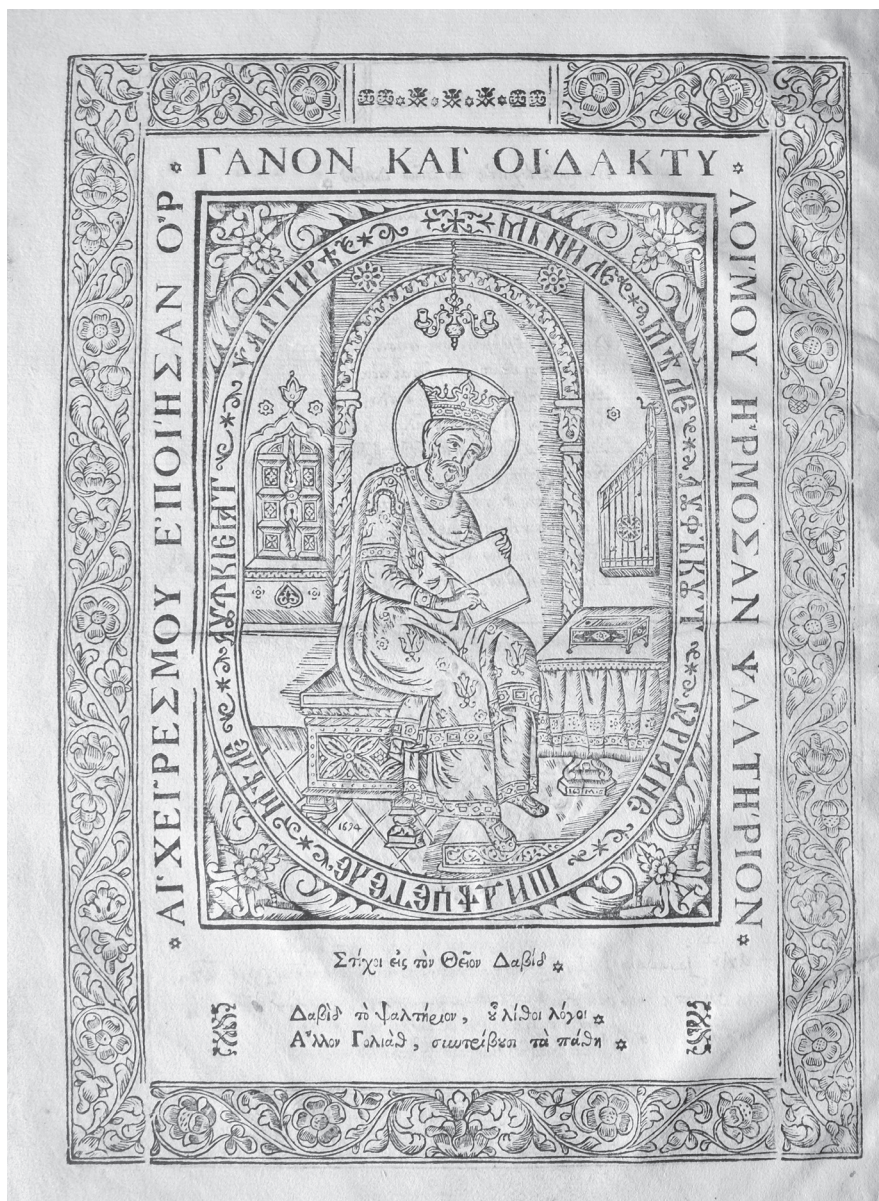


Fig. 14: David the Prophet and King, Psalter, Snagov, 1700, f. [2v] (B.A.R.).

Ὅσους σῶζων, μυσαγωγὴ καὶ γράφει.
 Ἀμαρτάνοντας εἰς ἐπιστροφὴν φέρει.
 Πολλοῖς πρὸ ἄλλοις, ἐκ κερτοδηλῶν κρείσιν.
 Σμήχεν διδάσκει, ψυχικὰς ἀμαρτάδας.



Fig. 15: *David the Prophet and King*, Psalter, Tbilisi, 1711, p. 4.



Fig. 16: Coat of arms of the Bagrationi royal family in *The Knight in the Panther's Skin*, Tbilisi, 1712, p. 2.

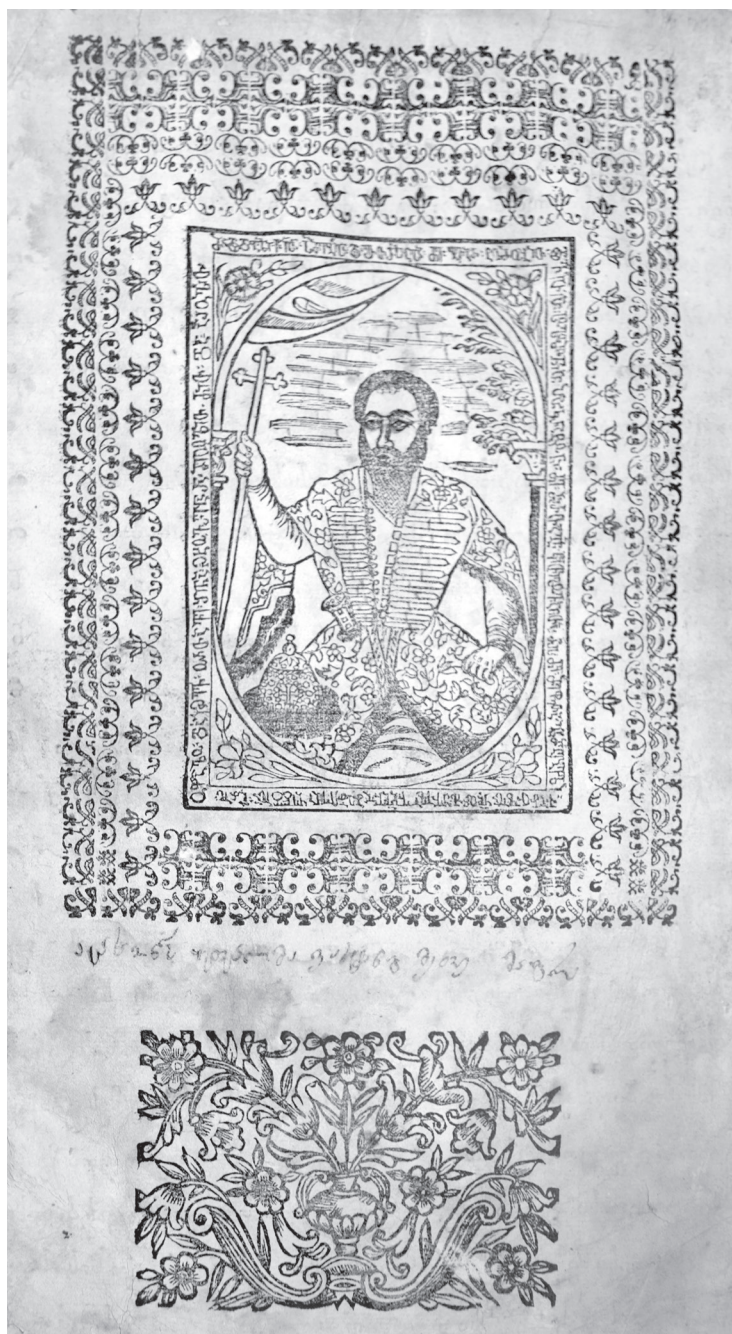


Fig. 17: Portrait of King Vakhtang VI in *The Knight in the Panther's Skin*, Tbilisi, 1712, p. 4.

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