

A German Monograph on Ancient Georgian Inscriptions

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Abstract: The present article deals with the study by Heinz Fähnrich, a well-known German scholar and Kartvelologist, published by Brill Academic Publishers in 2013, in Germany. The new monograph "Ancient Georgian Inscriptions" (Die ältesten georgische Inschriften) explores the diachronic pattern of Georgian writing through the example of the development of Georgian inscriptions and introduces a new argument emphasizing the tendency of letters to modify their graphic form that is, by acquiring an angular shape. Based on the latter argument the scholar attempts to restore the pattern of the chronological development of the Georgian alphabet. This article discusses fundamental arguments within the monograph and determines their relation to previous academic thought.

Key Words: *Heinz Fähnrich, Georgian alphabet, Ancient Inscriptions.*

In 2013, Brill Publishers published a Monograph "Ancient Georgian Inscriptions" [4]. Its author is a well-known scholar, an expert in Kartvelian studies, Heinz Fähnrich, due to whose painstaking work the German society has familiarized itself with Georgian culture for several decades [4; 5; 6; 7]. The present article is a brief overview of the above monograph.

"Ancient Georgian Inscriptions" consists of ten chapters listed below: The development of the Georgian Script; Old Georgian System of Consonants; Ancient Inscriptions in Georgia; Early Georgian Inscriptions in Palestine; Characteristics of Ancient Inscriptions; Discrepancies between Different Types of Inscriptions and other Exogenous Factors; Inscriptions from Nekresi; Typical Characteristics of Nekresi Inscriptions; Comparison of Two Types of Inscriptions; Written Symbols from Parnavazi's Epoch.

Even through the simple listing of the sections it becomes obvious that the monograph is a fundamental piece of research into the Georgian writing system through the example of diachronic transformation represented in the inscriptions. The first chapter "The development of the Georgian Script" describes three main stages of the formation of the Georgian script through demonstrating interrelations among them. In particular, it provides characteristics of each grapheme within the context of all of the three types of alphabet. At the same time, graphic signs enclosed in the study and the manifestation of transitional stages in different writing types make the development of the Georgian alphabet more evident and obvious for both foreign and native readers.

The second chapter "Old Georgian System of Consonants" contains a single page and presents the paradigmatic system of Old Georgian phonemes.

In the third and fourth chapters special attention is paid to the analysis based on ancient Georgian inscriptions (specifically, to Bolnisi, Urbnisi, Kumurdo, Palestine inscriptions) which leads to consideration of the fundamental issue of the monograph, the origin of the Georgian script and its relation to Christianity. The author considers few but exceptionally crucial arguments and states that, according to the worldwide practice, if an alphabet is created by a Christian figure, the author always enjoys a well-merited recognition. For instance, the creators of Gothic, Armenian and Slavic alphabets are well known worldwide. On the contrary, if the identity of the creator of the alphabet falls into oblivion, it is presumed that the script of a Christian country had been created before the adoption of Christianity (e.g. Coptic alphabet). In addition, as noted by Fahnrich, when a Christian author names a pagan figure to be the creator of an alphabet (in particular, King Parnavaz as named by Leonti Mroveli) it raises an issue, namely, that the Christian person would not have paid high tribute to a pagan figure had he not been certain about the authorship of the script. We remind our readers that academician E. Khintibidze applies the above-mentioned argument while casting doubt on the theory according to which the Georgian alphabet was created during the Christian period [3; 8]. Besides the above arguments, while discussing the stem of the word "tser" Heinz Fahnrich notes that etymologically the verb means "to scratch" and this was necessary to

write on such hard and solid surfaces as stone or clay which were widely used during the pagan period.

The chapter mentioned above is followed by the review of ten Nekresi and four Rustavi inscriptions; the researcher builds his theory upon the study "On Ancient Georgian Inscriptions of Nekresi [1; 2] by Levan Chilishvili, a well-known Georgian archaeologist, member of the Academy of Sciences of Georgia. Clearly, providing German and other academic circles interested in Georgian Studies with such a novelty is a fact of the utmost importance and requires a relevant appraisal on the part of the Georgian researchers.

The chapter dedicated to Nekresi inscriptions is not limited only by the simple listing of them. It deals with the exceptional graphic type that seems to be characteristic of the inscriptions of the pagan period and provides a comparative analysis of Christian and Pagan inscriptions. In particular, inscriptions from the Christian monuments previously studied only from four main directions (Graphic, Phonetic, Lexical and Stylistic), differ from the earlier inscriptions of Nekresi and Rustavi by the following characteristics:

As a result of their development, Christian inscriptions first followed closed, then open forms. Gradually the letters acquired an angular shape and at some stage they developed into a new type of writing. Inscriptions of Nekresi and Rustavi, similar to other Christian scripts, have revealed curved letters, though they do not show the tendency of taking an angular shape.

Christian inscriptions on the phonetic level reveal the following type of development: *khanmeti* ("khan" excessive) inscriptions - *haemeti* ("hae" excessive) inscriptions and *sannarevi* ("san" containing) inscriptions. Nekresi inscriptions belong to the *khanmeti* stage of development; neither *haemeti* nor *sannarevi* types are attested here.

In the later period, Christian inscriptions gradually show the facts of confusion and mixing of "ჟ"(khani) and "ბ"(kh). However, in Nekresi inscriptions the former symbol never replaces the latter one.

In Nekresi inscriptions there are no stylistic devices and word combinations typical of Christian ones.

The researcher considers the shape of the letter "o" from Nekresi and Rustavi inscriptions to be of an extraordinary significance which lies in the fact that in exceptional cases this letter becomes closer to the Greek "Omega". This fact might become one of the important

arguments while determining the origin of the alphabet. This leads the researcher to the conclusion that taking into account the peculiarities of Nekresi inscriptions, it becomes obvious that they precede typical Christian inscriptions and offer a number of interesting novelties in respect of the genesis of the Georgian alphabet.

The final chapter of the monograph is dedicated to the graphemes in ancient cultures (Trialeti culture). This part of the research is based on the artifacts found during archaeological excavations. The final chapter also sums up the main topic of the monograph and relates to the ancient roots of Georgian culture. The latter fact proves to be of great significance in the process of objective exploration of certain fundamental issues and promotion of the key problems and events.

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