

= Georgian scripts =

The Georgian scripts are the three writing systems used to write the Georgian language : Asomtavruli , Nuskhuri and Mkhedruli . Although the systems differ in appearance , all three are unicas , their letters share the same names and alphabetical order , and are written horizontally following the standard left @-@ to @-@ right direction . Of the three Georgian writing systems , Mkhedruli ( literally meaning " cavalry " or " military " script ) was the civilian royal script of the Georgian Kingdom used for charters , historical documents , manuscripts and inscriptions . Mkhedruli is therefore the standard script for modern Georgian and its related Kartvelian languages , whereas Asomtavruli and Nuskhuri are used only in ceremonial religious texts and iconography .

Georgian scripts are unique in their appearance and their exact origin has never been established ; however , in strictly structural terms , their alphabetical order largely corresponds to the Greek alphabet , with the exception of letters denoting uniquely Georgian sounds , which are grouped at the end . Originally consisting of 38 letters , Georgian is presently written in a 33 @-@ letter alphabet , as five letters are currently obsolete in that language . The number of Georgian letters used in other Kartvelian languages varies . The Mingrelian language uses 36 , 33 of which are current Georgian letters , one obsolete Georgian letter , and two additional letters specific to Mingrelian and Svan . That same obsolete letter , plus a letter borrowed from Greek ( making 35 letters total ) , are used in writing the Laz language . The fourth Kartvelian language , Svan , is not commonly written , but when it is , it uses Georgian letters as utilized in Mingrelian , with an additional obsolete Georgian letter and sometimes supplemented by diacritics for its many vowels .

Georgian scripts hold the national status of cultural heritage in Georgia , and are currently nominated for inclusion in the UNESCO 's list of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity .

= = Preview = =

= = Origins = =

The origins of the Georgian script are to this date poorly known , and no full agreement exists among Georgian and foreign scholars as to its date of creation , who designed the script and the main influences on that process .

The first version of the script attested is Asomtavruli which dates back to at least the 5th century ; the other scripts were formed in the following centuries . Most scholars link the creation of the Georgian alphabet to the process of Christianisation of a core Georgian @-@ speaking kingdom , that is , Kartli ( or Iberia in Classical sources ) . The alphabet was therefore most probably created between the conversion of Iberia under King Mirian III ( 326 or 337 ) and the Bir el Qutt inscriptions of 430 , contemporaneously with the Armenian alphabet . It was first used for translation of the Bible and other Christian literature into Georgian , by monks in Georgia and Palestine . Professor Levan Chilashvili 's dating of fragmented Asomtavruli inscriptions , discovered by him at the ruined town of Nekresi , in Georgia 's easternmost province of Kakheti , in the 1980s , to the 1st or 2nd century has not been universally accepted .

A Georgian tradition first attested in the medieval chronicle Lives of the Kings of Kartli ( ca . 800 ) , assigns a much earlier , pre @-@ Christian origin to the Georgian alphabet , and names King Pharnavaz I ( 3rd century BC ) as its inventor . This account is now considered legendary , and is rejected by scholarly consensus , as no archaeological confirmation has been found . Rapp considers the tradition to be an attempt by the Georgian Church to rebut the earlier tradition that the alphabet was invented by Mesrop Mashtots , and is a Georgian application of an Iranian model in which primordial kings are credited with the creation of basic social institutions . Georgian linguist Tamaz Gamkrelidze offers an alternate interpretation of the tradition , in the pre @-@ Christian use of foreign scripts ( alloglottography in the Aramaic alphabet ) to write down Georgian texts .

A point of contention among scholars is the role played by Armenian clerics in that process . According to a number of scholars and medieval Armenian sources , Mesrop Mashtots , generally

acknowledged as the creator of the Armenian alphabet , also created the Georgian and Caucasian Albanian alphabets . This tradition originates in the works of Koryun , a fifth century historian and biographer of Mashtots , and has been quoted by Donald Rayfield and James R. Russell , but has been criticized by scholars , both Georgian and Western , who judge the passage in Koryun unreliable or even a later interpolation . Other scholars quote Koryun 's claims without taking a stance on its validity . Many agree , however , that Armenian clerics , if not Mashtots himself , must have played a role in the creation of the Georgian script .

Another controversy regards the main influences at play in the Georgian alphabet , as scholars have debated whether it was inspired more by the Greek alphabet , or by Semitic alphabets such as Aramaic . Recent historiography focuses on greater similarities with the Greek alphabet than in the other Caucasian writing systems , most notably the order and numeric value of letters . Some scholars have also suggested as a possible inspiration for particular letters certain pre @-@ Christian Georgian cultural symbols or clan markers .

= = Asomtavruli = =

Asomtavruli ( Georgian : ????????? ) is the oldest Georgian script . The name Asomtavruli means " capital letters " , from aso ( ??? ) " letter " and mtavari ( ????? ) " principal / head " . It is also known as Mrgvlovani ( Georgian : ????????? ) " rounded " , from mrgvali ( ????? ) " round " , so named because of its round letter shapes . Despite its name , this " capital " script is unicameral , just like the modern Georgian script , Mkhedruli .

The oldest Asomtavruli inscriptions found so far date from the 5th century and are Bir el Qutt and the Bolnisi inscriptions .

From the 9th century , Nuskhuri script starting becoming dominant , and the role of Asomtavruli was reduced . However , epigraphic monuments of the 10th to 18th centuries continued to be written in Asomtavruli script . Asomtavruli in this later period became more decorative . In the majority of 9th @-@ century Georgian manuscripts which were written in Nuskhuri script , Asomtavruli was used for titles and the first letters of chapters . Although , some manuscripts written completely in Asomtavruli can be found until the 11th century .

= = Form of Asomtavruli letters = =

In early Asomtavruli , the letters are of equal height . Georgian historian and philologist Pavle Ingorokva believes that the direction of Asomtavruli , like that of Greek , was initially boustrophedon , though the direction of the earliest surviving texts is from left to the right .

In most Asomtavruli letters , straight lines are horizontal or vertical and meet at right angles . The only letter with acute angles is ? ( ? jani ) . There have been various attempts to explain this exception . Georgian linguist and art historian Helen Machavariani believes jani derives from a monogram of Christ , composed of the ? ( ? ini ) and ? ( ? kani ) . According to Georgian scholar Ramaz Pataridze , the cross @-@ like shape of letter jani indicates the end of the alphabet , and has the same function as the similarly shaped Phoenician letter taw ( ) , Greek chi ( ? ) , and Latin X , though these letters do not have that function in Phoenician , Greek , or Latin .

Coins of Queen Tamar of Georgia and King George IV of Georgia minted using Asomtavruli script , 1200 ? 1210 AD .

From the 7th century , the forms of some letters began to change . The equal height of the letters was abandoned , with letters acquiring ascenders and descenders .

Note : Some fonts show " capitalized " ( tall ) variants of Nuskhuri and Mkhedruli letters rather than Asomtavruli .

= = Asomtavruli illumination = =

In Nuskhuri manuscripts , Asomtavruli are used for titles and illuminated capitals . The latter were used at the beginnings of paragraphs which started new sections of text . In the early stages of the

development of Nuskhuri texts , Asomtavruli letters were not elaborate and were distinguished principally by size and sometimes by being written in cinnabar ink . Later , from the 10th century , the letters were illuminated . The style of Asomtavruli capitals can be used to identify the era of a text . For example , in the Georgian manuscripts of the Byzantine era , when the styles of the Byzantine Empire influenced Kingdom of Georgia , capitals were illuminated with images of birds and other animals .

Decorative Asomtavruli capital letters , ? ( m ) , ? ( n ) and ? ( t ) , 12 ? 13th century .

From the 11th @-@ century " limb @-@ flowery " , " limb @-@ arrowy " and " limb @-@ spotty " decorative forms of Asomtavruli are developed . The first two are found in 11th- and 12th @-@ century monuments , whereas the third one is used until the 18th century .

Importance was attached also to the colour of the ink itself .

Asomtavruli letter ? ( doni ) is often written with decoration effects of fish and birds .

The " Curly " decorative form of Asomtavruli is also used where the letters are wattled or intermingled on each other , or the smaller letters are written inside other letters . It was mostly used for the headlines of the manuscripts or the books , although there are compete inscriptions which were written in the Asomtavruli " Curly " form only .

The title of Gospel of Matthew in Asomtavruli " Curly " decorative form .

= = = Handwriting of Asomtavruli = = =

The following table shows the stroke order and direction of each Asomtavruli letter :

= = Nuskhuri = =

Nuskhuri ( Georgian : ??????? ) is the second Georgian script . The name nuskhuri comes from nuskha ( ????? ) , meaning " inventory " or " schedule " . Nuskhuri was soon augmented with Asomtavruli illuminated capitals in religious manuscripts . The combination is called Khutsuri ( Georgian : ?????? , " clerical " , from khutsesi ( ?????? " cleric " ) , and it was principally used in hagiography .

Nuskhuri first appeared in the 9th century as a graphic variant of Asomtavruli . The oldest inscription is found in the Ateni Sioni Church and dates to 835 AD . The oldest surviving Nuskhuri manuscripts date to 864 AD . Nuskhuri becomes dominant over Asomtavruli from the 10th century .

= = = Form of Nuskhuri letters = = =

Nuskhuri letters vary in height , with ascenders and descenders , and are slanted to the right . Letters have an angular shape , with a noticeable tendency to simplify the shapes they had in Asomtavruli . This enabled faster writing of manuscripts .

? ? Asomtavruli letters ? ( oni ) and ? ( vie ) . A ligature of these letters produced a new letter in Nuskhuri , ? uni .

Note : Without proper font support , you may see question marks , boxes or other symbols instead of Nuskhuri letters .

= = = Handwriting of Nuskhuri = = =

The following table shows the stroke order and direction of each Nuskhuri letter :

= = Use of Asomtavruli and Nuskhuri today = =

Asomtavruli is used intensively in iconography , murals , and exterior design , especially in stone engravings . Georgian linguist Akaki Shanidze made an attempt in the 1950s to introduce Asomtavruli into the Mkhedruli script as capital letters to begin sentences , as in the Latin script , but it didn 't catch on . Asomtavruli and Nuskhuri are officially used by the Georgian Orthodox Church

alongside Mkhedruli . Patriarch Ilia II of Georgia called on people to use all three Georgian scripts .

= = Mkhedruli = =

Mkhedruli ( Georgian : ??????? ) is the third and current Georgian script . Mkhedruli , literally meaning " cavalry " or " military " , derives from mkhedari ( ??????? ) meaning " horseman " , " knight " , " warrior " and " cavalier " .

Like the two other scripts , Mkhedruli is purely unicameral . Mkhedruli first appears in the 10th century . The oldest Mkhedruli inscription is found in Ateni Sioni Church dating back to 982 AD . The second oldest Mkhedruli @-@ written text is found in the 11th @-@ century royal charters of King Bagrat IV of Georgia . Mkhedruli was mostly used then in the Kingdom of Georgia for the royal charters , historical documents , manuscripts and inscriptions . Mkhedruli was used for non @-@ religious purposes only and represented the " civil " , " royal " and " secular " script .

Mkhedruli became more and more dominant over the two other scripts , though Khutsuri ( Nuskhuri with Asomtavruli ) was used until the 19th century . Since the 19th century , with the establishment and development of the printed Georgian fonts , Mkhedruli became universal writing Georgian outside the Church .

= = Form of Mkhedruli letters = =

Mkhedruli inscriptions of the 10th and 11th centuries are characterized in rounding of angular shapes of Nuskhuri letters and making the complete outlines in all of its letters . Mkhedruli letters are written in the four @-@ linear system , similar to Nuskhuri . Mkhedruli becomes more round and free in writing . It breaks the strict frame of the previous two alphabets , Asomtavruli and Nuskhuri . Mkhedruli letters begin to get coupled and more free calligraphy develops .

Example of one of the oldest Mkhedruli @-@ written texts found in the royal charter of King Bagrat IV of Georgia , 11th century .

" Gurgen : King : of Kings : great @-@ grandfather : of mine : Bagrat Curopalates "

Coin of Queen Tamar of Georgia in Mkhedruli , 1187 AD .

= = Modern Georgian alphabet = =

The modern Georgian alphabet consists of 33 letters :

= = Letters removed from the Georgian alphabet = =

The Society for the Spreading of Literacy among Georgians , founded by Prince Ilia Chavchavadze in 1879 , discarded five letters from the Georgian alphabet that had become redundant :

? ( he ) , sometimes called " ei " or " e @-@ merve " ( " eighth e " ) , was equivalent to ?? ey , as in ????? ~ ????? krist 'ey ' Christ ' .

? ( hie ) , also called iota , appeared instead of ? ( ini ) after a vowel , but came to have the same pronunciation as ? ( ini ) and was replaced by it . Thus ????? ~ ????? krist 'ey " Christ " is now written ????? krist 'ei .

? ( vie ) came to be pronounced the same as ?? vi and was replaced by that sequence , as in ????? > ????? skhvisi " others " .

? ( qari , hari ) came to be pronounced the same as ? ( khani ) , and was replaced by it . e.g. ????? became ????? " sovereign " .

? ( hoe ) was used for the interjection hoi ! and is now spelled ??? .

All but ? ( hoe ) continue to be used in the Svan alphabet ; ? ( hie ) is used in the Mingrelian and Laz alphabets as well , for the y @-@ sound / j / . Several others were used for Abkhaz and Ossetian in the short time they were written in Mkhedruli script .

= = Letters added to other alphabets = =

Mkhedruli has been adapted to languages besides Georgian . Some of these alphabets retained letters obsolete in Georgian , while others required additional letters :

ჲ ( fi " phi " ) is used in Laz and Svan , and formerly in Ossetian and Abkhazian . It derives from the Greek letter ϕ ( phi ) .

ჳ ( shva " schwa " ) , also called yn , is used for the schwa sound in Svan and Mingrelian , and formerly in Ossetian and Abkhazian .

ჲჲ ( elifi " alif " ) is used in for the glottal stop in Svan and Mingrelian . It is a reversed ჲჲჲ ( q 'ari ) .

ჲ ( turned gani ) was once used for [ ʔ ] in evangelical literature in Dagestanian languages .

ჲ ( aini " ain " ) is occasionally used for [ ʔ ] in Bats . It derives from the Arabic letter ʔ ( ʔ ain ) .

=== Handwriting of Mkhedruli ===

The following table shows the stroke order and direction of each Mkhedruli letter :

ჲ , ჲ , and ჲ ( zeni , oni , khani ) are almost always written without the small tick at the end , while the handwritten form of ჲ ( jani ) often uses a vertical line , ( sometimes with a taller ascender , or with a diagonal cross bar ) ; even when it is written at a diagonal , the cross @-@ bar is generally shorter than in print .

Only four letters are x @-@ height , with neither ascenders nor descenders : ჲ , ჲ , ჲ , ჲ .

Thirteen have ascenders , like b or d in English : ჲ , ჲ , ჲ , ჲ , ჲ , ჲ , ჲ , ჲ , ჲ , ჲ , ჲ , ჲ , ჲ .

An equal number have descenders , like p or q in English : ჲ , ჲ , ჲ , ჲ , ჲ , ჲ , ჲ , ჲ , ჲ , ჲ , ჲ , ჲ , ჲ .

Three letters have both ascenders and descenders , like þ in Old English : ჲ , ჲ , and ( in handwriting ) ჲ . ჲ has both ascender and descender in print , and sometimes in handwriting .

=== Variation ===

There is individual and stylistic variation in many of the letters . For example , the top circle of ჲ ( zeni ) and the top stroke of ჲ ( rae ) may go in the other direction than shown in the chart ( that is , counter @-@ clockwise starting at 3 o 'clock , and upwards ? see the external @-@ link section for videos of people writing ) . Other common variants :

ჲ ( gani ) may be written like ჲ ( vini ) with a closed loop at the bottom .

ჲ ( doni ) is frequently written with a simple loop at top , .

ჲ , ჲ , and ჲ ( k 'ani , tsani , dzili ) are generally written with straight , vertical lines at the top , so that for example ჲ ( tsani ) resembles a U with a dimple in the right side .

ჲ ( lasi ) is frequently written with a single arc , . Even when all three are written , they 're generally not all the same size , as they are in print , but rather riding on one wide arc like two dimples in it .

Rarely , ჲ ( oni ) is written as a right angle , .

ჲ ( rae ) is frequently written with one arc , , like a Latin ʔ h ʔ .

ჲ ( t 'ari ) often has a small circle with a tail hanging into the bowl , rather than two small circles as in print , or as an O with a straight vertical line intersecting the top . It may also be rotated a bit clockwise , with the small circles further to the right and not as close to the top .

ჲ ( ts 'ili ) is generally written with a round bowl at the bottom , . Another variation features a triangular bowl .

ჲ ( ch 'ari ) may be written without the hook at the top , and often with a completely straight vertical line .

ჲ ( he ) may be written without the loop , like a conflation of ჲ and ჲ .

ჲ ( " jani " ) is sometimes written so that it looks like a hooked version of the Latin " X "

=== Similar letters ===

Several letters are similar and may be confused at first , especially in handwriting .

For ჲ ( vini ) and ჲ ( k 'ani ) , the critical difference is whether the top is a full arc or a ( more @-@ or @-@ less ) vertical line .

For ? ( vini ) and ? ( gani ) , it is whether the bottom is an open curve or closed ( a loop ) . The same is true of ? ( uni ) and ? ( shini ) ; in handwriting , the tops may look the same . Similarly ? ( sani ) and ? ( khani ) .

For ? ( k 'ani ) and ? ( p 'ari ) , the crucial difference is whether the letter is written below or above x @-@ height , and whether it 's written top @-@ down or bottom @-@ up .

? ( dzili ) is written with a vertical top .

= = Ligatures , abbreviations and calligraphy = =

Asomtavruli is often highly stylized and writers readily formed ligatures , intertwined letters , and placed letters within letters .

A ligature of the Asomtavruli initials of King Vakhtang I of Iberia , ? ? ( ?? , GN )

A ligature of the Asomtavruli letters ? ? ( ?? , da ) " and "

Nuskhuri , like Asomtavruli is also often highly stylized . Writers readily formed ligatures and abbreviations for nomina sacra , including diacritics called karagma , which resemble titla . Because writing materials such as vellum were scarce and therefore precious , abbreviating was a practical measure widespread in manuscripts and hagiography by the 11th century .

A Nuskhuri abbreviation of ?????? ( romeli ) " which "

A Nuskhuri abbreviation of ????? ????? ( iesu kriste ) " Jesus Christ "

Mkhedruli , in the 11th to 17th centuries also came to employ digraphs to the point that they were obligatory , requiring adhesion to a complex system .

A Mkhedruli ligature of ?? ( da ) " and "

Mkhedruli calligraphy of Prince Garsevan Chavchavadze and King Archil of Imereti

= = Type faces = =

Georgian scripts come in only a single type face , though word processors can apply automatic ( " fake " ) oblique and bold formatting to Georgian text . Traditionally , Asomtavruli was used for chapter or section titles , where Latin script might use bold or italic type .

= = Punctuation = =