PART A – ESSENTIAL INFORMATION

1 SUMMARY

The National Centre of Manuscripts is the most important depository of ancient manuscripts and historical documents in Georgia.

Major treasures of Georgian culture and history, kept at different times in various libraries and private collections, are brought together in the depositories of the National Centre of Manuscripts: richly illustrated unique manuscripts, old printed books and rare editions, heirlooms, etc.

Old Georgian manuscripts occupy a special place in the treasury of the Georgian national culture. History, travels, dictionaries, hagiography, Church law, philosophy, this short list shows the variety of the ancient Georgian manuscripts. The study of the Georgian culture by means of the Georgian written language monuments can be traced back only to the 5th century. These samples of the written language have survived as epigraphical monuments (made on stone and mosaic) and manuscripts (palimpsest).

In the National Center of Manuscripts 1000 Georgian manuscripts are kept that cover different fields and spheres. The collection is especially rich in manuscripts of ecclesiastic character – exegetical, ascetical, hymnographic, polemical manuscripts, mostly translated from Greek.

The collection is of an enormously great importance for scholars of the Byzantine period, also for the world cultural heritage. It is widely acknowledged that the Georgian Manuscript heritage contains unique material for the Byzantine cultural development. These works have preserved the samples lost in Greek and other languages. They preserve important references to the Byzantine authors that replenish the life and work of those writers and unknown writers of the Byzantine literary history;

This collection is unique, that is defined by its content and the importance of the works.

The significance of the Collection is deemed to transcend the boundaries of time and culture, and it should be preserved for present and future generations and made accessible to all peoples of the world in some form.

2 DETAILS OF THE NOMINATOR

2.1 Name (person or organisation)
National Centre of Manuscripts

2.2 Relationship to the documentary heritage nominated
Collection preserved at the National Centre of Manuscripts.

2.3 Contact person (s)

**Buba Kudava**, Director of the National Centre of Manuscripts

**Tamar Gegia**, Deputy Director National Centre of Manuscripts

2.4 Contact details (include address, phone, fax, email)

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3 IDENTITY AND DESCRIPTION OF THE DOCUMENTARY HERITAGE

3.1 Name and identification details of the items being nominated

The 1000 Georgian manuscripts of the Centre are kept in 4 different fonds.


*Fonds H* - collection of the Georgian MSS of the former Historical and Ethnographic Society of Georgia. The Historical and Ethnographic Society of Georgia was founded in 1907 in Tbilisi, on the initiative of the well-known Georgian historian and antiquary, Acad. Ekvtime Taqaishvili.

*Fonds Q* - new collection - the only growing collection of Georgian MSS. The fonds was set up in 1919 in Tbilisi, within the State Museum of Georgia. The MSS fonds of the Museum was augmented through purchases and private donations, as well as by nationalization of MSS identified by well-known Georgian scholars in different regions of Georgia.

*Fonds S* - collection of the Georgian MSS of the former Society for the Spread of Literacy among the Georgians. The Society was founded in 1879 in Tbilisi, on the initiative of the renowned Georgian public figures: Ilia Chavchavadze, Dimitri Qipiani, Iakob Gogebashvili, and others. From 1888, at the suggestion of the Georgian publicist Iona Meunargia, the Society commenced search and gathering of MSS.
All of these fonds are gathered now at the Centre’s depositories. Among the important works, a special place is given to a group of Byzantine manuscripts. This collection consists of 451 manuscript books and dates back to the 10th-15th centuries.

The National Centre of Manuscripts will nominate this collection to the Memory of the World Register.

Manuscripts Collection (total 451 items):
A (collection of the Ecclesiastical Museum): 190 items
H (collection of the former Historical and Ethnographic Society of Georgia): 166 items
S (collection of the former Society for the Spread of Literacy among the Georgians): 69 items
Q (collection of the the only growing collection of Georgian MSS): 31 items

The nominee is distinguished by its listing anciency variety of literary genres and scientific value. Within its dated manuscripts there are almost all the old Georgian literary genres represented.

Owner and Custodian of the documentary heritage:
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3.2 Description

3.2.1 Description and inventory

Byzantine period Georgian codexes are kept in 4 different fonds of the National Centre of Manuscripts (A (collection of the Ecclesiastical Museum), H (collection of the former Historical and Ethnographic Society of Georgia), S (collection of the former Society for the Spread of Literacy among the Georgians), Q (collection of the only growing collection of Georgian MSS)), catalogues and the scientific descriptions of which had been accomplished by the Centre’s employees and published in 30 volumes. This work continues in the Centre and electronic versions of them are being prepared.

3.2.2. Provenance

Old Georgian manuscripts in different times were kept at different monasteries. On the verge of XIX-XX centuries, with the initiative of the Georgian intellectual elite, several important organizations had been founded – Literacy Dissemination Organization (1879), Church Museum (1888) and Historic-Ethnographical Organization (1907) – that aimed to collect manuscript books and various samples of material heritage, their study and preservation. The data collected by this group was later transferred into the possession of the Georgia National Museum (1929 – 1930) and was established as a manuscript department. In 1958 a new organization – The Institute of Manuscripts was founded, where the rich manuscript heritage was gathered. In 2007 the Institute was renamed into the National Centre of Manuscripts. The nominated collection is now kept at the National Centre of Manuscripts.
3.2.3 Analysis or assessment of physical state and condition, such as description of storage arrangements, conservation diagnosis etc.

The abovementioned collection is located in the depository of the Centre maintained with appropriate temperature conditions and the relative humidity level. The depository is equipped with shelves and boxes.

3.2.4 Visual documentation:

At the National Centre of Manuscripts there also functions a Digitization Laboratory that always digitizes the important manuscript legacy and prepares the electronic data-bases. 100 manuscripts of the nominated collection had already been digitized (up to 34 000 images). Also, there are microfilms and photocopies of a part of the manuscripts kept at the Centre.

4 JUSTIFICATION FOR INCLUSION/ ASSESSMENT AGAINST CRITERIA

The evaluation made is of a comparative and relative nature and there exists no absolute criteria with regard to the cultural significance of the submitted collection.

4.1 Is authenticity established? (See 4.2.3)

The authenticity of the submitted documents can be established considering the following:

a) The Type of Parchment and paper used for manuscripts is typical of the Byzantine era and reflects the material used in their production and their place of production. During different times the manuscripts were realized in different ways: on rushes, leather, and paper. Georgia has used paper since the 10th century which was imported and later processed locally. The nominated collection contains a very important manuscript written in the Lavra of Sabbas the Sanctified (H-2123, 10 c.) where rush and parchment are interchanged. The text itself is dated from 8th century and depicts the Jerusalem liturgical practice and holds a place among the most important early Byzantine works, the models of which are now lost.

An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith of Saint John of Damascus (A-24), the best piece of work of the Black Mountain - is one of the earliest manuscripts. With the translation of the first part of the work Ephrem Mtsire founded Georgian philosophical literature.

b) Script: There are three stages of development of the alphabet in Georgian manuscripts: asomtavruli (majuscule), nuskhuri (minuscule) and mkhedruli (civil). The nuskhuri script was used since the 9th century while early monuments of the civil writing belong to the 11th century. Chronological consistency of study of the monuments from the graphical point of view has shown that transition from one stage of writing to another, due to the tendency towards cursive writing, is gradual. If we follow the changes of the graphical contours of separate letters through the centuries, we can notice their regular development.

c) Topic and content: a style characteristic of the Byzantine epoch. The Early Georgian hagiographic work “The Martyrdom of St. Shushaniki” (476-483) belongs to the Parkhali Collection (A-95, 10 c.), also as well as the “Martyrdom of Abo” 8 c. Between the ecclesiastic books special attention is given to the typikons – “Great Synaxarium” (A-97, 11 c.) of George the Hagiorite and “The Minor Synaxarium”
(1030) enriched with luxurious illustrations (72). It is important to note that the translations of the editions of these synaxaria (A-97, A-635) exist only in Georgian and no other language.

d) One of the most important works of the collection is the hymnal of the 10th century (S-425), where the neumal notation is met, the semiography and text placement differs from the contemporary palaeo-byzantine neumal system and indicates the authenticity of the Georgian neumal script. This system of neumas (as the palaeo-byzantine) is not deciphered yet and it is difficult to define the kind of tunes of the hymns. But the difference between the contemporary, reconstructed Greek and Georgian works of liturgical function, make us believe that the Georgian hymn of that period is built on the independent tone. Furthermore, Georgian hymns are polyphonic, while the Greek is monophonic. Because the polyphony is the indivisible part of the Georgian national consciousness and is the main form of its musical thought, it is very natural to think that it dissociated from the monophonic Greek chant and established its organic polyphonic singing in the liturgy.

e) **Colophons and comments:** the authenticity of the works is sometimes determined by the colophons and comments either interpolated directly into the text or given on the margins. The Manuscript is often followed by the colophon, where the place, date and the customer names are given. Sometimes inscriptions are seen on the incrusted covers (Q-907).

4.2 **Is world significance, uniqueness and irreplaceability established?**

The collection is of an enormously great importance for the scholars of Byzantine period, also for the world is tural heritage.

It is widely acknowledged that the Georgian Manuscript heritage contains unique material of the Byzantine cultural development. The earliest of these are bibliological works – parts of early period old testament that are preserved in fragmented form, and the complete version of the New Testament that can be found already in the late 9th century. A very important place is held by A-89. This is a large format manuscript (439 folios), the upper section which belongs to the 11th century, while the lower represents gospel and dates back to the 6th century. It is worth mentioning that the palimpsest lower layer contains an unprecedented huge volume for a gospel and in case of its study it will become possible to restore one of the earliest examples of translation and largest part of the gospel in the whole Byzantine space.

The main characteristics of the nominated collection are:

- These works have preserved samples lost in Greek and other languages.
- It preserves important references to the Byzantine authors that replenish the life and work of those writers;
- It preserves references to unknown writers of the Byzantine literary history;
- Some of the works of the Byzantine literature are conveyed differently in Georgian;
- “Balahvar, Abukura etc.” were translated from Georgian into Greek.

This collection is unique, as is defined by its content and the importance of the works.

The collection is the only one of its kind by its content and visual characteristics. It gives the clear image of Georgian cultural heritage and literary processes of the Byzantine period.

The collections are unique and significant at world level.
4.3 Is one or more of the criteria of (a) time (b) place (c) people (d) subject and theme (e) form and style (f) social, spiritual and community significance satisfied?

a) **Time**: the manuscripts belong to the 10-15th centuries, namely to the period when Georgia has exclusively close relations to the Byzantine Empire, to the whole Byzantine world. Based on this, these manuscripts reflect and preserve the literary, historic, liturgical, juridical or medical knowledge existing in Middle Ages of the Near East. It is also important that in most of the cases this knowledge is not practiced anymore and is kept only in written sources.

b) **Place**: The Georgian collection of the Byzantine period consists of the manuscripts written in different monasteries or cultural centres of different periods. This collection, representing a Georgian national treasure, had been created in Georgia, also abroad in these centres. Educational centres coexisting with the monasteries in Georgia and abroad have played a very important role. In 5-8th centuries there were up to 20 Georgian cloisters in Palestine and on Mount Sinai. The Lavra of Sabbas the Sanctified, Monastery of the Cross in Jerusalem, St. Catherine Monastery Mount Sinai, Iviron of the Mount Athos, Petritsoni in Bulgaria, where translations from Greek were carried out and original hymnographic and liturgical works created, held distinguished places. Georgian manuscripts reflect Byzantine and Georgian spiritual poetry and music traditions from the 6th century and contain rare information on early byzantine liturgical practice that is often preserved only in Georgian works. In 1054 the Alaverdi Gospel (A-484) was rewritten on Mount Sinai, represents one of the most brilliant works of the Georgian manuscript heritage. The cover is decorated with silver inrustation. Except for the four gospels, the text contains apocryphal text – Epistula Abgari.

c) **People**: The importance of the collection is also determined by sociological and anthropological aspects. On one hand, this is connected to the persons directly involved into the work (authors, translators, rewriters, illustrators, bookbinders etc). On the other hand, it gives some ideas on social interests and activities, their role in the society, religious beliefs, life style, law and medicine, governance etc. A special place in the collection is held by the works of Byzantine holy fathers – Gregory of Nazianzus, Basil the Great, John Chrysostom, Maximus the Confessor – the translation of whose works carried out the holy fathers – Ioanne and Euthymius Hagiorites, Arsen of Iqalto, Ioanne Petritsi etc.

d) **Subject and Theme**: These manuscripts often contain information already forgotten today. The terminology used here, attested to financial or administrative systems, social elements, and cultural views that were characteristic of the Byzantine epoch.

e) **Form and style**: The decorative aspects of the collection works is also very peculiar. It is distinguished by its luxurious illustrations, diverse animal and floral decor elements immanent to the Byzantine world. Among the illustrated manuscripts of the XI century Ekvthime Mtatsmideli's synaxarium can be noted: The manuscript has preserved only 78 miniatures showing the Saints and the scenes from the life of Christ. The miniatures stand out for their top-quality fulfilment. In the end of Alaverdi Four Gospels the Letter of Christ to Augar is placed. The message is magnificent not only for its perfection of fulfilment, but it is unique from the viewpoint of decoration. The brief text is richly decorated with miniatures and artistic initials.

The XII century is presented by a group of manuscripts which are unique in their artistic properties, incomparable painting methods and colours (Gospels from Gelati, Jruchi, Works of Gregory the Theologian, Astronomical treatise). Many of them are illustrated.
The Gospel from Mokvi illustrates Christ's ancestors' genealogy (from Adam to the Holy Virgin). The 42 miniatures. Gelati's and the Second Jruchi's Gospels show successively the scenes of Christ's life (359 miniatures in the Second Jruchi's Gospel and 244 miniatures in Gelati's Gospel). Several artists took part in painting miniatures in the rich manuscripts and this can be seen both in the manner of writing and in the peculiarities of the colours.

Most of the illustrated manuscript books are of ecclesiastic content as Psalters, synaxarium, triodium, the Four Gospels. However there are some secular works as well, e.g. the manuscript of the Astronomical treatise (A-65), XII cent. We could also name some miniatures of secular content in the ecclesiastic works, such as the composition "Spring" from the manuscript "Works of Gregory the Theologian") A-109, a great number of battle scenes from "Tetrosani" H-75 and psalm books H-1665, etc.

Gold in the combination of colours increases the decorative effect. Painters of this period present space conventionally by means of golden background. Gold in miniatures covers the space round the picture. We know only one case where miniatures were made on gold (the Gospel from Mokvi, 1300), the colouristic aspect is special here; gold is combined with pearl blue, wine red and green colours.

In the manuscripts with more Mustratio golden contour outlines each ornamental detail of gold is used to finish furniture, clothes; sometimes where the form requires lightening the painter covers gold by touches (the Second Jruchi's, Vani's Gospel) or presents folds of the clothes by means of beamlike lines (Synaxarium of Ekvthime Mtatsmideli). The gold is still gleaming and clear. In this aspect the miniatures of Gelati's Gospel particularly stand out.

As the books were portable, the manuscripts made by Byzantine artists or ornamented like those made by Byzantine artists were quite popular in Georgia. The fact certainly influenced the nature of decoration of Georgian manuscripts, the authors of which mastered the fine appearance and some motives of the Byzantine book-making art.

f) Social, spiritual and community significance: The manuscripts forming the nominated collection is not only the most important monuments of the old Christian literature, they also well developed book making art. Making an ancient manuscript book consisted of successive interconnected processes (processing of the parchment, rewriting, painting of the text pages, decoration of the manuscript by the engraved frame work, etc.), required a certain division of labour, participation of different skilful specially trained workers.

4.4 Are there issues of rarity, integrity, threat and management that relate to this nomination?

Unity of the collection is conditioned by its thematic and chronological principles.

The collections are kept in temperature controlled rooms and are used for keeping manuscripts in the National Centre of Manuscripts. Temperature in storages varies between about 18-19° C in winter to 21-22° C in summer; relative humidity remains fairly constant at around 50-52%.

The National Centre of Manuscripts of Georgia is a national organization which tries to manage the hand-written heritage in line with the international standard.

There are standing plans to respond to different types of emergencies or disasters, such as theft and robbery, fire, vandalism, accidents and terrorism. There are also post-emergency recovery plans.
Recognising the importance of the manuscripts in the collection its custodians have, from the beginning, endeavoured to ensure its long-term survival, while at the same time making it available to the scholarly community.