

Mihail Ștefan (Mikhail Stepanishvili) and the Emergence of Georgian Printing: New Archival Evidence *

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In memory of Bernadette Martin-Hisard

The emergence of the Georgian printing press in the early 18th century is closely linked to the activities of Mihail Ștefan, also known as Mihail Iștvanovici or Stepanishvili/Stepanov, a typographer of Greek-Wallachian origin who worked in Tbilisi for the Georgian King Vakhtang VI between 1709 and 1711. Drawing on newly identified archival materials from Moscow, this essay reassesses the role of artisans and their networks in the development of print culture within the Orthodox Christian East. The connections linking Wallachia, Tbilisi, Moscow, and Western European centres such as Amsterdam highlight the circulation of technical expertise and typographic materials across a broad transregional space. Archival evidence from Moscow dated to 1712 and 1714 sheds new light on the final years of Mihail Ștefan's life, as well as on his involvement in the interconnected printing enterprises in Wallachia, Georgia, and Moscow.

Keywords: *Georgian Printing, Early Modern Print Culture, Orthodox Christianity, Mihail Ștefan, Antim the Iberian, Vakhtang VI, Archil II of Imereti*

In recent years, the study of book printing in the early modern period has attracted increasing scholarly attention. The most significant advances in this field have been achieved by researchers who have turned to a subject that long remained in the margins of academic inquiry: the appearance of the first printing presses for Christian communities in the East. Wallachian princes and typographers played a crucial role in supporting the publication of books, especially liturgical texts, intended for use far beyond the borders of their own country. In this context, Bucharest emerged as

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one of the principal centres within broader networks of intellectual exchange, contributing both to the organisation of typographic presses and to the circulation of printed books. The long-established printing centres of Western Europe also played a significant role, involved in the transmission of technical knowledge and typographic materials. The emergence of the printing press in the Georgian language illustrates how such wider connections made possible the development of an early modern print culture within the Christian East. Newly surveyed archival materials have proven to be a valuable source for the study of these processes, providing fresh evidence on the establishment of printing presses in Tbilisi and Moscow and the individuals involved in it.

The eminent typographer, later a Metropolitan of Ungro-Wallachia, Antim the Iberian, who prepared the first Greek-Arabic editions of the *Divine Liturgies* and the *Book of Hours* at Snagov and Bucharest, respectively, as well as numerous books in Romanian, Church Slavonic and Greek, was of Georgian origin. The beginnings of book publishing in Georgia are likewise closely associated with his name, as it was Antim who sent his close collaborator, Mihail Ștefan, also known as Iștvanovici and later Stepanishvili (“Son of Stepan”) in Tbilisi, to the ruler of Kartli, King Vakhtang VI (1703 – 1711/1714; 1719 – 1724), who was eager to establish a printing press in his country.¹ In contact with the patriarch of Jerusalem Chrysanthos Notaras and with the assistance of the prince of Wallachia Constantin Brâncoveanu, Mihail Iștvanovici was able to initiate in Tbilisi book printing in the Georgian language, with Georgian

¹ Ioan Bianu, Nerva Hodoș, *Bibliografia românească veche 1508 – 1830*, t. I: 1508/1716 (Bucharest: Socec, 1903), 483–84, 543–48; David Marshall Lang, *The Last Years of the Georgian Monarchy, 1658–1832* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1957), 130–33; Andrei Pippidi, “À propos des débuts de l’imprimerie en Géorgie,” in *Impact de l’imprimerie et rayonnement intellectuel des Pays Roumains* (Bucharest: Editura Biblioteca Bucureștilor, 2009), 25–40; Ioana Feodorov, “Sprijin duhovnicesc prin tipar pentru creștinii georgieni în vremea Domnului Constantin Brâncoveanu,” in *Spiritualitatea mărturisitoare a culturii românești în perioada Sfântului Martir Constantin Brâncoveanu* (Râmnicu-Vâlcea: Editura Praxis a Arhiepiscopiei Râmnicului, 2014), 47–61; Archim. Mihail Stanciu, “Sfântul Antim Ivireanul, ipodiatonul Mihail Iștvanovici i începuturile tiparului georgian,” *Orthodoxia. Revistă a Patriarhiei Române* VII, no. 3 (2015), 83–100; Archim. Policarp Chițulescu et al., *Antim Ivireanul. Opera tipografică* (Bucharest: Institutul Cultural Român, 2016), 24–25; Feodorov, *Arabic Printing for the Christians in Ottoman Lands. The East-European Connection* (Berlin-Boston: De Gruyter, 2023), 319–23; Nino Kavtaria, “The Georgian Books of the First Tbilisi Printing Press and Their Artistic Decoration (1709–1722),” in *Icons, Ornaments, and Other Charms of Christian Arabic Books. Second Volume of Collected Works of the TYPARABIC Project*, eds. Oana Iacubovschi, Samuel Noble and Ioana Feodorov (Berlin-Boston: De Gruyter; Brill, 2024), 315–55.

type.² The first book was published in 1709, and over the following three years the press managed to produce around ten titles (20 titles altogether during its complete period of activity).³ The introductions and endnotes of the books published in 1709 – 1710 refer to the typographer Mihail Stepaneshvili, described as being of “Ungro-Wallachian” origin, and emphasize the role of the Wallachian prince Constantin Brâncoveanu as a benefactor of the Georgian printing press, alongside its founder, King Vakhtang VI.⁴

In 1873, historian D. Bakradze,⁵ while visiting the library of Prince S. Abashidze, discovered a *Liturgicon* printed in 1710. Upon examining the book, he realized that the text of the poetic introduction was written in the Romanian language, transcribed using Georgian characters. With the assistance of his acquaintance Louise Bakalović, who knew Romanian, Bakradze succeeded in translating the text and even published it using Latin characters. The poem, written in the voice of the typographer, speaks about his feelings of satisfaction upon completing his work on a book, a feeling likened to that of a traveller returning home after a long journey.⁶ The lady who assisted Bakradze with the Romanian text suggested that this typographer from Wallachia might in fact have been of Greek origin.⁷

This observation is noteworthy, as it finds an interesting parallel in a record preserved in the Russian State Archives of Ancient Acts in Moscow. One of the files in the Muscovite archives documents the arrival in the Russian capital of a certain Greek “Michail the Typographer,” also referred to as “Mikhail Stepanov,” or “Stephan’s son,” exactly as in the case of Mihail Iștvanovici/Mihail Ștefan.⁸ It appears that in 1712, one “servant Nikolai,” a Georgian, identified in archival documents as “Nikolai Vladov”,⁹ who

² Feodorov, *Arabic Printing*, 319; Kavtaria, “The Georgian Books,” 317–19, 325.

³ Kavtaria, “The Georgian Books,” 322.

⁴ Feodorov, *Arabic Printing*, 319 – 320; Kavtaria, “The Georgian Books,” 323–32.

⁵ Alžběta Filipová, “For Beauty, Nation and God. The Creation of the Georgian National Treasure,” *Venezia Arti* 27 (2018): 41–50.

⁶ Pippidi, “À propos des débuts de l’imprimerie,” 25.

⁷ Dmitrij Bakradze, *Археологическое путешествие по Гурии и Адчаре. С атласом [An archaeological tour of Guria and Adjara. With an atlas]* (Saint Petersburg, 1878), 4–8.

⁸ This designation, “Mikhail the Typographer,” closely corresponds to the form in which Mihail Iștvanovici’s name appears in the Romanian *Euchologion* published in Râmnic in 1706: the editor is identified as “Mihai Ișvanovič, subdeacon, Typographer.” See Bianu, Hodoș, *Bibliografia românească veche*, 541–43.

⁹ Nikolai Vladov signed in Georgian in Mkhedruli script on the Muscovite administrative document, confirming the information provided during the interrogations. He wrote “Nikolaie meveli” (), meaning “Nicholas the servant”: Rossijskij

was accompanying Mikhail Stepanov (all names are Russified), attempted to travel from Moscow to Astrakhan and, from there, to return to his homeland without official permission. This transgression caused difficulties not only for him but also for the Greeks whom he had asked to take him along.¹⁰ One of them, Semyon Dmitriev from Trebizond, together with Nikolai and the others, was subjected to an interrogation, the record of which was drawn up by officials of the Muscovite Ambassadorial Office. During their investigation (which took place in summer and continued until September 1712), Nikolai revealed that he had arrived in Moscow in the company of his master “Mikhail the Typographer,” who had been engaged in book printing for Archil, the King of Imereti:

As soon as he [Semyon] set out from Moscow for Astrakhan, at that time a Georgian named Nikolai, who resided with King Archil Vakhtangeevich¹¹ of Imereti, attached himself to him, requesting that he take him from Moscow to Astrakhan as a servant, because his master, likewise a Georgian, who had come to Moscow to the King of Imereti for the purpose of printing books, had departed earlier for Astrakhan, and he had not managed to leave together with him. And he, Semyon, took him, Nikolai, along with him as a servant as far as Astrakhan... And the Georgian said that his name is Nikolai Vladov; he is of Imeretian origin. In the present year 1712, though he does not recall the exact month or day, he arrived from the land of Imereti as a servant of a Greek merchant, named Mikhail the Typographer, who had come to the Imeretian tsar. And in that same year, the aforementioned Greek, Mikhail the Typographer, departed for Amsterdam, while he [Nikolai] remained in Moscow. In that same year, in the month of July, the Greek Semyon Dmitriev set out with Armenian merchants to Persia via Astrakhan, and he, desiring to travel to Persia, asked him [Semyon] to take him, [Nikolai] along as a servant. And he, Semyon, took him along, but he did not obtain a travel pass, as he was unfamiliar with the custom... The Georgian Nikolai Vladov was entrusted, under receipt, to a man of Tsar Archil Vakhtangeevich of Imereti, Aleksei Popov. Should Nikolai be summoned to appear at

ნიკოლაი მეველი

gosudarstvennyj arhiv drevnih aktov [Russian State Archive of Ancient Acts, hereafter RGADA], f. 52, inv. 1, 1712, no. 16, fol. 10r. I am grateful to Nina Iamanidze (Paris) for her assistance in reading the signature.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, fol. 5r-17r.

¹¹ The Muscovite Ambassadorial Office appended a patronymic, that is, a name derived from the father's name, to that of the King of Imereti in order to emphasize his noble origin and to convey respect. Accordingly, the Georgian name of Archil's father, King Vakhtang V Shah-navaz (1658–1675), was adapted to conform to Russian patronymic usage, resulting in the form “Vakhtangeevich.”

the Ambassadorial Office, he [Aleksei Popov] is under an obligation to present him, Nikolai; and he is not to depart from Moscow without authorization. If he should depart, a penalty to [be paid to the treasury of] His Majesty shall be exacted from Aleksei in accordance with this receipt.¹²

Archil II, of the Bagrationi dynasty, formerly King of Imereti (1661 – 1663, 1678 – 1679, 1690 – 1691, 1695 – 1696, 1698) and of Kakheti (1664 – 1675), son of King Vakhtang V Shah-navaz and uncle of King Vakhtang VI, was himself a poet, the author of several important literary works. Deposed from his throne and exiled, he took residence near Moscow, in the village of Vsesvjatskoe, which had been granted to his son Alexander in 1696 upon his marriage to Theodosia Miloslavskaja.¹³ For a time, therefore, Nikolai remained at the Georgian king's court, while the typographer Mikhail Stepanov had meanwhile travelled to Amsterdam.¹⁴

This brief information does not contradict the previously established facts concerning the famous typographer Mihail Iștvánovici, who is documented as having been present in Georgia between 1708 or 1709 and 1711, occupied in book publishing.¹⁵ Subsequently, as known from a

¹² *Ibidem*, fol. 9r-11r: “Толко де какъ онъ поѣхалъ с Москвы в Астрахань, і в то время грузинець Николай, которой жил у ц(а)ря Арчила Вагтангѣвича Меретинского, присталъ к нему, чтоб онъ ево свесъ с Москвы до Астрахани за челядника, потому что де хозяйинъ ево, грузинець же, которой приѣзжалъ к Москве к ц(а)рю меретинскому для печатанья книгъ, и поѣхал в Астрахань напередъ, а онъ с нимъ ѣхать не успѣлъ. И онъ де, Семень, ево, Николая, взялъ с собою за челядника до Астрахани... Грузинець сказалъ: Николаемъ ево зовутъ, Владовъ, родомъ онъ Меретинскіе земли, і в н(ы)нешнемъ де 712-м, а в которомъ м(ѣс)яцѣ и числе, того онъ сказать не упомянуть, із Меретинской земли пріѣхалъ онъ с торговымъ грекомъ Михайломъ Типограѣомъ, которой пріѣзжалъ к царю меретинскому, за челядника. И сего жъ году помянутой гречанинъ Михайло Типограѣъ поехалъ в Амстердамъ, а онъ остался на Москвѣ. І сего жъ году в ѣюле м(ѣс)яцѣ поехалъ чрезъ Астрахань в Персиду гречанинъ Семень Дмитреѣвъ с торговыми армяны, и онъ, пожелая ехать в Персиду, просилъ ево, чтобъ онъ взялъ ево с собою за челядника, и онъ де, Семень, взялъ ево с собою, а проезжей грамоты не взялъ онъ для того, что не зная обыкновенія... Грузинець Николай Владовъ отданъ на росписку ц(а)ря Арчила Вагтангѣвича Меретинского ч(сло)в(ѣ)ку ево, Алеѣзью Попову. И какъ ево, Николая, в Посолской приказъ спросять, і ему ево, Николая, поставить і без указу с Москвы не съехать, а буде съедеть, и на немъ, Алеѣзе, великого г(осу)д(а)ря пеня по сей росписке.”

¹³ Ivan F. Tokmakov, *Историко-статистическое и археологическое описание села Всехсвятскаго Московской губернии и уезда с 1398–1898 г.* [*A historical, statistical and archaeological account of the village of Vsekhsvyatskoye in the Moscow Governorate and district, 1398–1898*] (Moscow: Pechatnja A. I. Snegirevoj, 1898), 11–28; Lang, *The Last Years of the Georgian Monarchy*, 122–23.

¹⁴ RGADA, f. 52, inv. 1, 1712, no. 16, fol. 10r.

¹⁵ Pippidi, “À propos des débuts de l'imprimerie,” 31–32; Kavtaria, “The Georgian Books,” 321–22.

letter of Antim the Iberian to Patriarch Chrysanthos of Jerusalem, dated April 6, 1713, Antim's "disciple Mihail" had left Georgia (this had happened, as specified in the letter, a year earlier, i.e., in 1712) and had arrived in Moscow. From there, he intended to depart for Holland, although Antim indicates that he had no information regarding the duration of Mihail's stay abroad.¹⁶ It is clear that both Antim's letter and the archival documents from Moscow refer to the same individual, Mihail Ștefan/Mikhail Iștvanovici. Antim seems to have maintained a continued interest in Mihail's movements at that time, as evidenced by his earlier letter (January of the same year), in which he expressed the hope that Mihail would return to Bucharest to work in the "new typography".¹⁷

The Muscovite documents unequivocally identify the typographer as Greek. Although, regrettably, no example of his signature has survived in the extant archival documents, the evidence suggests that his immediate circle in Moscow consisted entirely of Greeks. One of them, named in the Russified form of "Spiridon Manouilov" and in his Greek signature as Spandonis, signed documents on behalf of Mihail Iștvanovici.¹⁸ His collaborators (apart from the Georgian Nikolai) were likewise all Greek, and in Moscow he resided at the Greek Monastery of St Nicholas.¹⁹ It is therefore plausible to identify him as a Greek by origin, born in Wallachia.

Mihail Iștvanovici appears to have left Tbilisi following Vakhtang's departure for Isfahan in 1712, as ordered by the Iranian shah. There, the king remained for several years, which made the continuation of printing activities in Tbilisi impossible for some time.²⁰ The typographer evidently maintained contacts with Vakhtang's uncle, Archil, in Moscow, where he decided to go the same year. During his Muscovite exile, King Archil established the first Georgian printing press and started book-publishing in Georgian.²¹ The sorts used for this activity were brought from Amsterdam, where the type had been manufactured by the Transylvanian artisan Nicholas Kis (Misztótfalusi Kis Miklós, 1650 – 1702), who made his

¹⁶ Eudoxiu de Hurmuzaki, *Documente privitoare la istoria românilor*, XIV (III): *Documente grecești (c. 1560 - c. 1820)*, ed. N. Iorga (Bucharest: Institutul de Istorie Nicolae Iorga, 1936), 112, no. 70. See Arhim. Mihail Stanciu, "Scrisoarea episcopului Antim al Râmnicului către patriarhul Ierusalimului Hrisant Notara," *Ortodoxia* VI, no. 2 (2014): 96–103.

¹⁷ Hurmuzaki, *Documente*, XIV (III), 107, no. 66.

¹⁸ RGADA, f. 52, inv. 1, 1714, no. 2, fol. 1r-2v.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, fol. 1r.

²⁰ Kavtaria, "The Georgian Books," 335.

²¹ *Ibidem*, 316–317.

career in the Elzevier publishing house.²² The story of the transfer of these types from Amsterdam to Moscow is quite complicated. The commission to obtain Georgian types was reportedly transmitted to Kis through the Swedish diplomat and learned orientalist Johan Gabriel Sparwenfeld (1655 – 1727), whom King Archil met in Moscow, and through another erudite Swedish diplomat, Nicolaas Witsen (1641 – 1717), the mayor of Amsterdam.²³ The type matrices had already been prepared in the 1680s. However, the increasingly strained relations between Muscovite Russia and Sweden, followed by the Great Northern War (1700 – 1721), as well as the political instability in the Kingdom of Imereti, delayed the transfer of the sorts to Archil.²⁴

His son, Alexandre Bagrationi, a commander in the Russian artillery, was captured and held prisoner in Sweden during the war. While forced to stay in Stockholm, he reportedly commissioned the new casting of sorts in the Swedish capital on the basis of Nicholas Kis's matrices brought to him from Amsterdam.²⁵ It seems that all these sorts were intended for use in Georgia, with the aim of establishing the printing press there.²⁶ By 1701, the Georgian typographic material was in the possession of Alexandre Bagrationi, who requested permission from the Swedish authorities to send two boxes containing the types to his father, who returned to Moscow after the failed attempt to keep his throne. Finally, in 1704, the Georgian types were dispatched from Stockholm to Moscow,

²² Jack Stauffacher, "The Transylvanian Phoenix: the Kis-Janson Types in the Digital Era," *Visible Language* 19, no. 1 (1985): 61–76; Edmond Schütz, "The Oscanian and Vanandian Type-faces of the Armenian Printing Office in Amsterdam: Christoffel Van Dijk - Nicholas Kis of Tótfalu and Their Forerunners," *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 42, no. 2 – 3 (1988): 187–88, 198, 202–05; Vladimir Yefimov, "Civil Type and Kis Cyrillic," *Language Culture Type: International Type Design in the Age of Unicode*, ed. John D. Berry (New York: ATypI Graphis, 2002), 128–47; Pippidi, "À propos des débuts de l'imprimerie," 35–36; Doru Bădără, "The Beginning of Printing and Print Culture in the Romanian Principalities," in *Arabic-Type Books Printed in Wallachia, Istanbul, and Beyond*, eds. Radu Dîpratu and Samuel Noble (Berlin-Boston: De Gruyter, 2024), 136–37.

²³ Pippidi, "À propos des débuts de l'imprimerie," 34–36. See *J. G. Sparwenfeld's Diary of a journey to Russia, 1684 – 87*, ed. Ulla Birgegård (Slavica Suecana, series A, vol. I) (Stockholm: Kungl. Vitterhets Historie och Antikvitets Akademien, 2002), 220–21, 230–33, 338.

²⁴ Dzhuansher Vateishvili, "Грузинские отиски из Амстердама. О некоторых вопросах истории грузинского книгопечатания в начале XVIII века," ["Georgian Prints from Amsterdam: On Certain Aspects of the History of Georgian Book Printing in the Early 18th Century"], *Литературная Грузия [Literary Georgia]* 4 (1981): 171; Pippidi, "À propos des débuts de l'imprimerie," 36.

²⁵ Vateishvili, "Грузинские отиски из Амстердама," 174.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, 175; Schütz, "The Oscanian and Vanandian typefaces," 202–03.

where they were used to cast one more font and to produce the first Georgian printed book in 1705, the *Psalter* (*Davitni*).²⁷

The activity of this Georgian printing press in Moscow still raises several questions. One of them concerns the location of the press. The *Psalter*, was supposedly printed in the Moscow Printing House²⁸ (which later, from 1721, was transferred to the Church and became the Synodal Typography).²⁹ On the title page it says:

To the glory of the Holy, Consubstantial, Life-giving, and Indivisible Trinity, the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit; by the command of our most pious great sovereign, Tsar and Grand Prince Petr Alexeyevich, Autocrat of all Great, Little, and White Russia, in the time of our noble sovereign, the Tsarevich and Grand Prince Alexei Petrovich, and with the blessing of the most reverend hierarchs during the vacancy of the patriarchal see, this God-inspired book, the Psalter, in the Imeretian dialect and characters, was printed in the royal Muscovite typography in the year from the Creation of the world 7113, and from the Nativity according to the flesh of God the Word 1705, on the 13th of the month of March.³⁰

The Cyrillic characters used on the title page of this edition and the characters indicating the *folii* numbers are the same as those employed in other publications of the Printing house intended for church services (a different font had already been produced for secular books). However, later, when King Vakhtang VI himself was forced into exile to Moscow and continued the book-publishing enterprise there, his printing press

²⁷ Lang, *The Last Years of the Georgian Monarchy*, 132; Vateishvili, “Грузинские оттиски из Амстердама,” 175–77.

²⁸ Vateishvili, “Грузинские оттиски из Амстердама,” 178; Ketevan Gigashvili, “Essential Textual and Editorial Markers of the Editions of the Bible’s Georgian Translations in the Pre-Soviet, Soviet and Post-Soviet Eras,” *Cultural Intertexts* 9 (2019), 89; Kavtaria, “The Georgian Books,” 315.

²⁹ Aleksandr N. Solov’ev, Государев печатный двор и синодальная типография в Москве. Историческая справка [*The Tsar’s Printing House and the Synodal Typography in Moscow: A Historical Overview*] (Moscow: Sinodalnaja tipografija, 1903), 67.

³⁰ “Во славу с(вя)тыя единосущныя, животворящія и нераздѣлимыя Тр(ои)цы, Отца, и С(ы)на, и С(вя)таго Д(у)ха: повелѣніемъ бл(а)гочестивѣйшаго великаго г(осу)д(а)ря нашего ц(а)ря и великаго кн(я)зя Петра Алеѣевича всея Великія, и Малыя, и Бѣлыя Россіи самодержца, при бл(а)городнѣйшемъ г(осу)д(а)рѣ нашемъ, ц(а)р(е)в(и)чѣ и великомъ кн(я)зѣ Алеѣи Петровичѣ, бл(а)гословеніемъ же преос(вя)щенныхъ архіереевъ между патріаршествомъ: напечатася сія б(о)годохновенная книга Ѳалтирь імеретинскимъ діалектомъ и писмены: въ ц(а)р(с)твенной московской тѹпографіи: въ лѣто ѿ сотворенія міра 7113, ѿ р(о)ж(дес)тва же по плоти Б(о)га Слова 1705, Індікта 13, м(ѣс)яца марта.” - *Davitni* [*Psalter*], Moscow, 1705, fol. 1r, copy provenance: RGADA, BMST in3552.

was located in the residence of the Georgian royal family in Vsesvjat-skoe.³¹ One may therefore ask whether the very first Muscovite Georgian printing press was also located in the king's residence, while the Cyrillic types for the Psalter edition were provided by the local Printing House.

The decorations of the 1705 Psalter seem to have been later used as models. For example, the woodcut depicting a bouquet of flowers from the Psalter of 1705 appears to have been a model for a woodcut reproduced in Georgian books printed later in Moscow (*Emperor Basil the Macedonian's Chapters of Admonition to His Son Leo the Wise*, translated into Georgian and published in 1739, RNB, ОНЛ Грыз./1 – 1452, fol. 56v), as well as for the Tbilisi edition of the *Acts of the Apostles* (1791, BAV, Racc. Gen. Liturgia II. 17). But the later fate of the woodcuts used to decorate the 1705 Psalter is unknown.

The arrival of Mikhail Ștefan, alias Mihail Iștvanovici/Stepanov, at the court of King Archil in Moscow, as well as his subsequent journey to Amsterdam, appear to have been connected to his typographic activities. It is likely that he intended to continue his work under the patronage of King Archil, as he tried to return to Moscow after the sojourn in Holland. The next mention of Mikhail Stepanov in Russian archival documents dates to February 1714. At the end of that month, “the Greek Mikhail Stepanov” from Imereti, together with his servants “Vasilij Evangelnev” and “Pavel Dmitrev,” received permission to travel from Moscow to Astrakhan, possibly on their way to Georgia. King Archil, the initiator of the Muscovite printing project, had passed away in 1713, and “Mikhail the Typographer” likely decided to go back to Tbilisi, where Georgian books were still published in 1712 – 1713.³² Thus, he never returned to Bucharest, as had been expected, but tried to continue his work for the Georgian rulers. Although the Muscovite printing press of the Georgians which was active at the very beginning of the 18th century did not endure and had to be restarted later, its collaborators maintained close ties with Vakhtang VI's press, demonstrating that these early efforts of launching Georgian book printing were interconnected.

Archival research in Moscow has provided new insights into the involvement of typographers from the Romanian Principalities and their benefactors in spreading the art of printing throughout the Christian East. This research highlights that book printing for the Orthodox Christians

³¹ Tokmakov, Историко-статистическое и археологическое описание, 19–20, 28; Dzhuanisher Vateishvili, “The First Georgian Printed Bible. On the History of its Appearance,” *Estudios Bíblicos* 41 (1983): 216–17.

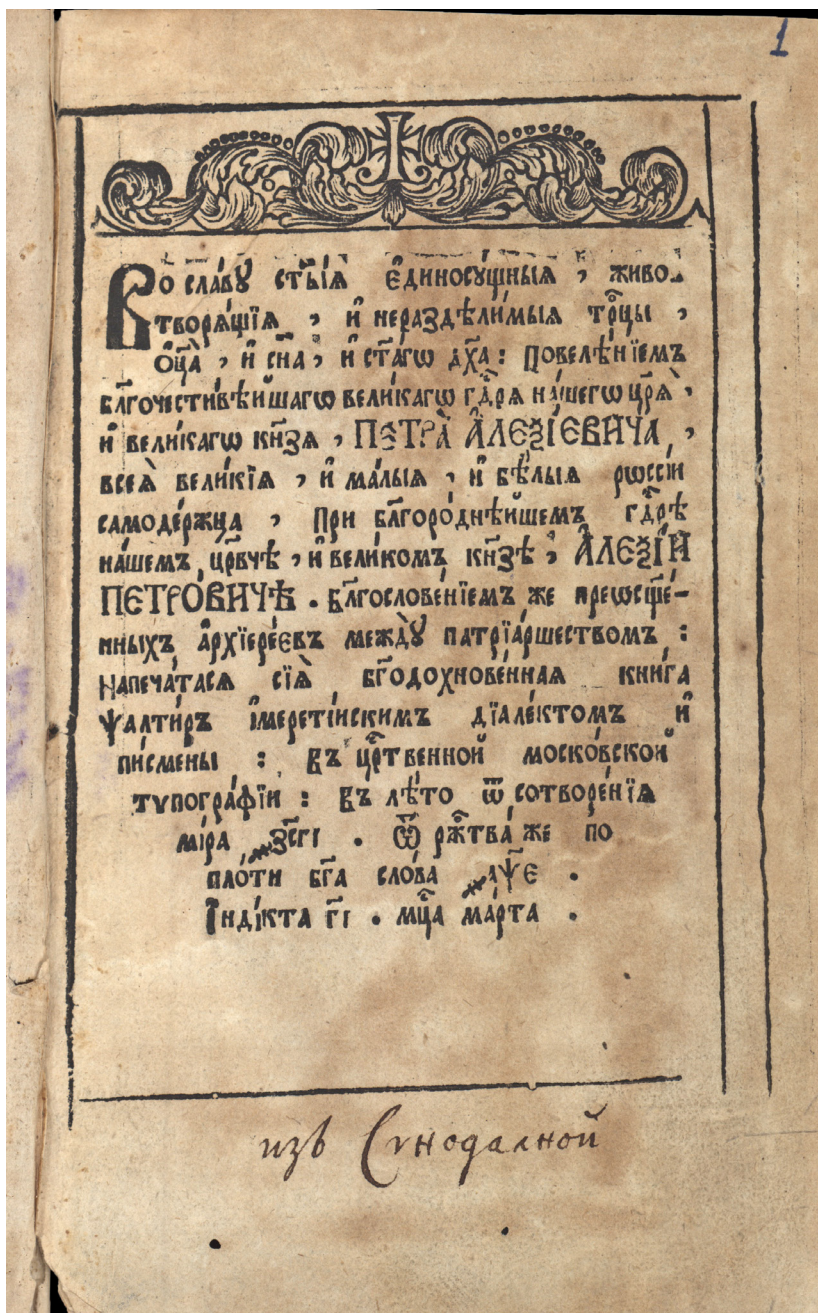
³² RGADA, f. 52, inv. 1, 1714, no. 2, fol. 1r – 3v.

was a dynamic and evolving process: printing typesets, tools and materials were frequently transported across borders, typographers moved between countries to practice their craft, and the books they produced often travelled great distances before reaching their readers. The archival documents reveal a network of intellectual and technical exchange, while mobility played a crucial role in the dissemination of printing and its material support. The international community of typographers was instrumental in fostering these connections. This constant circulation of knowledge, people, materials and, surely, important financial support not only facilitated the spread of printed texts but also demonstrated how Eastern Orthodox communities were interconnected by shared religious and cultural goals, actively contributing to the dissemination of Christian texts.

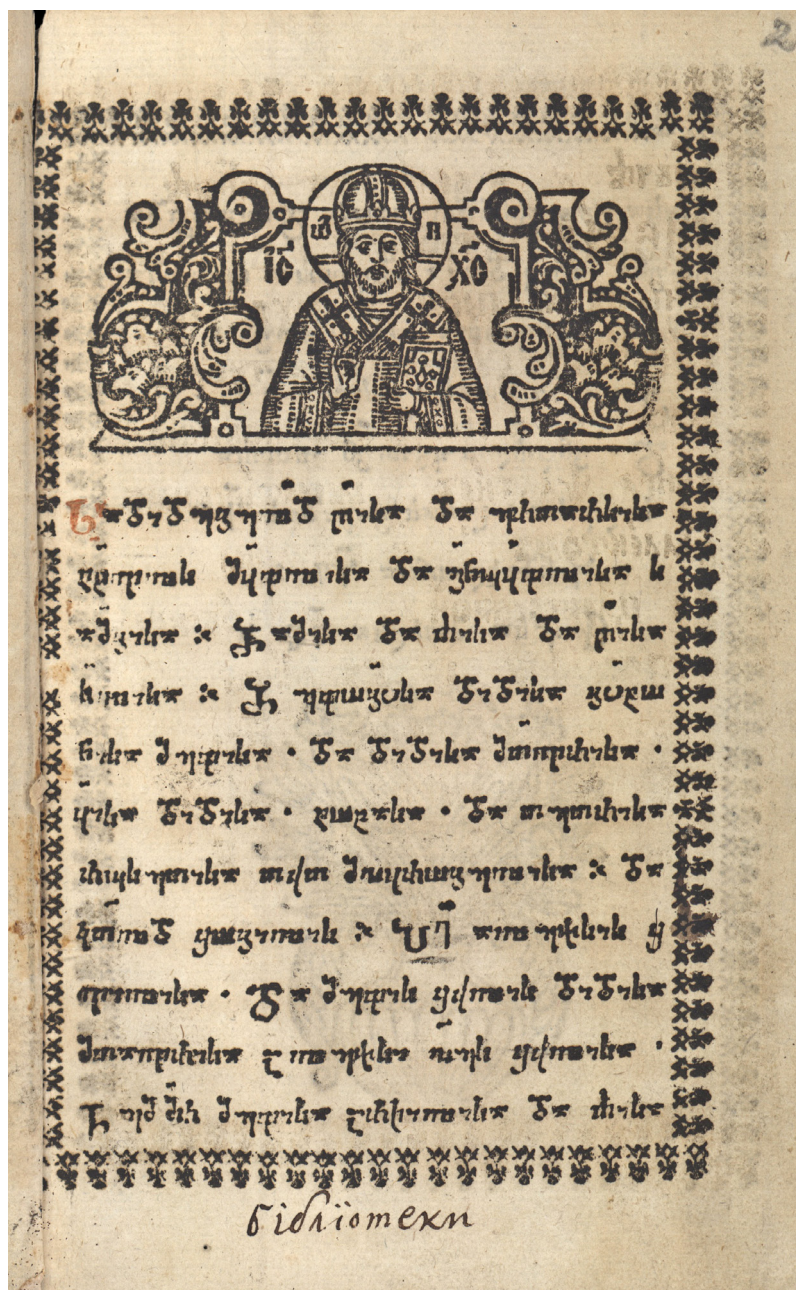
Illustrations:



Davitni [Psalter], Moscow, 1705, RGADA, BMST in3552, fol. 2v-3r.



Davitni [Psalter], Moscow, 1705, RGADA, BMST in3552, fol. 1r.



Davitni [Psalter], Moscow, 1705, RGADA, BMST in3552, fol. 2r.