

The conservation of the 10th century Georgian manuscript
(H-1660, Jruchi I Gospels, 936-940)

The Jruchi I Four Gospels (260x210mm) is preserved in Georgia at the National Centre of Manuscripts (H-1660). The manuscript received its name after its last location place. It was kept in Jruchi Monastery till 1919. The Gospel was copied in 936 at the Shatberdy Lavra of the Tao-Klarjeti monastic centre and was illustrated with Canon Table and miniatures in 940.

The text of the Gospel is executed on parchment in the Asomtavruli script and contains 297 folios. The text is written with brown ink which changes into dark brown or black color. The gospel is bound and has a combined metal and blind-stamped reddish-brown tanned leather cover. The upper part of the cover is decorated with silver spheres that form a cross, adorned with red stones from which only one remains at its place.

The binding is damaged, especially the lower leather cover, wooden board, endband, spine, and the fastenings.

The wooden board is split into two pieces, a part of the stamped leather cover is missing and is almost completely separated from the board. Only one of the original three silver pegs and a circular plate with a ring is present, an original leather strap which was directly fixed to the peg is also missing. The original chevron type endband has been brought down to us as mere fragments, several deformed folios with insignificant folds and missing pieces are detached from the text block. Nonetheless such damage, the wooden board was firmly attached to the textblock with the hinging loops and the endband which extends over the boards' edges. Decorated, stamped leather was secured to the upper board with silver nailed spheres as well.

In order to preserve the cultural and historic values of the Jruchi I Gospels, it was important to develop a method that would allow the repairing of the split board and filling in the missing parts of the leather without disassembling the manuscript and destroying the original sewing, board attachment and the fragments of the original endband.

In choosing the method of restoration attention was focused on old techniques and materials used for the repair of the split wooden board and the original leather cover, applied in the past on Georgian manuscripts.

Georgian written historical sources of the 10th-18th centuries contain information concerning rebinding and renewal of the damaged and dismembered codices. The study of colophons and codicological analysis of manuscripts restored in the Middle Ages presented an opportunity to investigate original techniques and materials used for the repair of the split wooden board and the original leather cover, which facilitated the development of the conservation method for the Jruchi I Four Gospels' cover.

The selection of the conservation method and material was based on the technique of wooden board and the original leather cover repair used in old Georgian manuscripts.