

History

Euthymius the Athonite: Great Bilingual Literary Tradition

Irakli G. Shekriladze

Georgian Technical University, Tbilisi

(Presented by Academy Member Roin Metreveli)

ABSTRACT. The paper outlines the role of Georgian background in the hypothetic Georgian-Greek project “Buddha-Iodasaf-Josaphat”. Examination of the extraordinary bilingual literary works of Euthymius the Athonite highlights important features of the phenomenon “Barlaam and Josaphat”, which was considered as just a “popular book” for a millennium until it was comprehended as the first step on the long journey to the European Enlightenment and the authorship of Euthymius was finally recognized. This fact not only reunited the great Georgian-Greek tandem “Balavariani” - “Barlaam and Josaphat” divided over centuries in consequence of misunderstanding, but also gave a new dimension to the figure of Euthymius. Although the reassessment has just begun, we can already assume that this process will gain a qualitative character. Along with the comprehension of Byzantine and European context of Euthymius the Athonite’s heritage, historians will have to newly analyze the Georgian civilization breakthrough of the 11th- 12th centuries, mainly inspired by the same Euthymius the Athonite. “Barlaam and Josaphat” will appear with yet another new facet as the realization of the Georgian cultural potential to give an impetus to the thousand-year process of convergence of East and West, peoples and religions.
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The process of attribution of “Barlaam and Josaphat” lasting for centuries overshadowed its artistic merits and role in the development of European literature. For instance, there is not a single word about these maxims in the relevant article of the Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium [1], devoted exclusively to the issue of attribution.

Real discussion of “Barlaam and Josaphat” as the great masterpiece of the Middle Ages, began only in the 21st century. Researchers of the problem unanimously emphasize the outstanding literary merits and

the immense spheres of its influence [2-5].

Not waiting the disclosure of complete picture, Silvia Ronchey [2,5] gives brief remarks about the known literature generated by the novel.

The list of addressees is quite impressive: Rudolf von Ems, Catherine of Siena, Jacobus de Voragine, Gui de Cambrai, Boccaccio, Shakespeare, Lope de Vega, Pedro Calderon de la Barca, Aleph of Borges, Marcel Schwob, Vincent of Beauvais, Jacopo da Varazze, Baudelaire, Leo Tolstoy, Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Hermann Hesse, urban medieval

French literature, French and German medieval epic, the 18th-19th century European literature.

Sylvia Rouchey was the first who pronounced the role of the novel in European civilization, declaring “Barlaam and Josaphat” as the first step on the long journey to the European Enlightenment [2]. Not so fast the process of rethinking and reassessment of the vast cultural heritage and historical data, and revision of established values was launched.

Cordoni [6] studied the role of “Barlaam and Josaphat” in French, Provençal, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, German, Scandinavian and British literary and folk traditions. Ribas [7] discusses some aspects of the imperial and religious politics of Byzantium of the late 10th and early 11th century, as reflected in the novel. Lopez Jr. and McCracken [8] consider the novel in terms of processes of sharing the ideas between the religions born thousands of miles away from each other.

A qualitatively new stage can be seen in recently published extensive collection of studies [9]. Two dozens of researchers from different countries as well as the title itself clearly demonstrates rapidly changing situation around the novel in general.

In the previous article [10], we tried to show that the first phase of the Georgian Euthymius the Athonite’s activities gives a genuine insight into the second one, the Byzantine phase.

Within the Georgian-Byzantine project “Buddha-Iodasaph-Josaphat” he was able to combine the fundamental interests of the Byzantine Empire and the Orthodox Church with certain pan-European civilizational momentum.

Below we link the phenomenon of “Barlaam and Josaphat” to the outstanding bilingual literary creativity of Euthymius the Athonite, considering his Georgian literary works as the prologue to the great Greek novel.

Hard way to the truth

Volk admitted the possibility that it might be Euthymius himself, who concealed the real genesis and authorship of the novel [4: 94]. Shared also by

Rouchey [11: LXXXII], this inference received further support through analysis of the Georgian-Byzantine relations in the 11th century [10: 146].

Below we do not dwell on historical details described in the prior studies [3-4, 11-12]. We only refer to some quite specific episodes, which markedly detained the attribution in the 20th century.

Among them, the findings of Frederick Conybiere (published in 1896) left beyond the academic discussion deserves special attention [13].

Quite important results of the research, which might close the problem in the late 19th century, remained inactive throughout the 20th century. Unexpected belated promotion of the same findings in the form of facsimile edition (published in 2008) [14] after final attribution of “Barlaam and Josaphat” in 2006 were no less strange [3: vii-viii].

According to the annotation of the book [14], “Conybiere makes a compelling argument for the Georgian version as the earliest Christian form from which came a Greek and later a Syriac translation, of which the Armenian is an abridgement.”

Nowadays the book [14] is often used as the main proof of final attribution (see, the article “Barlaam and Jospahat” in online resources Questpedia, Bahaistudies.net, Wikipedia). The question is what prevented the study to play the same role right away after its publication.

Correctness of quoting the edition of 2008 (rather than the Journal version of 1896) showing the novelty of the findings also raises the question.

Deactivation of the article could be partly due to fact that it was not published in a special journal of Byzantine studies. However, in the 19th century this circumstance could not play a decisive role, since the main form of mutual exchange of scientific information was personal communication. For example, in the same article, the author notes that “Balavariani” was sent to him by Nicholas Marr. By the way, it is interesting, whether the author informed Nicholas Marr about the results of the study.

Unfortunately, in any case, we are faced with the

fact that the important findings, capable to solve the problem of attribution, are “frozen” over a century and no additional actions are taken to activate them. The fact of its republication in the form of a book in 2008 [14] when the problem was already solved [3: vii-viii] only emphasizes the strangeness of situation.

Another constraint was a powerful wave of skepticism emerged in the mid 20th century about the Euthymius the Athonite’s ability to create the great Greek masterpiece.

In general, of course, skepticism is a mighty tool for cognition and its overcoming is the most effective way to truth. Especially, as in this case the skepticism went from the pillars of Byzantine and ancient Georgian literary studies, Franz Doelger and Korneli Kekelidze.

Justly regarding “Barlaam and Josaphat” as the best creation of Byzantine literature, in 1953 Doelger declared that for nearly half a millennium (650-1085), he hardly saw any historical figure other than John of Damascus, able to create such a masterpiece [15: 64].

Now, after the attribution of the novel, there is no point to discuss such a specific approach in detail. We can only point to its obvious drawback - the neglect of the need of comprehensive knowledge of the Georgian background and the personality of Euthymius the Athonite.

The hypothesis of Kekelidze derived from the analysis of the whole chain of the primary source - “Balavariani” - “Barlaam and Josaphat” deserves detailed analysis [16]. Characteristic feature of the hypothesis is not just declared de-facto skepticism regarding the leading role of Georgian intellectuals at decisive stages of the chain.

The starting analysis focused on definition of the geographical, religious and historical circumstances determining the need of Christianized biography of the Buddha. It is concluded that the first Christianized biography based on the Pahlavi version of the Buddha’s life was created in Syriac, the Nestorian metropolis of India in the mid seventh

century. Later, this version was redeveloped into Arabic one that was finally translated into Georgian [16: 149].

Unfortunately, in this case, we are faced with one of the negative effects of deactivation of the Conybeare’s findings [13].

The point is that Conybeare was the first to apply the same logic. As a result, he arrived at a conclusion that “the earliest Greek form of the Christianized biography of the Buddha probably originated in Bactria in the third century A.D., in the circles, in which the religions of Jesus and Buddha met and mingled” [13: 141].

At the same time, correctly assessing the risk of unreserved reliance on the general logic, Conybeare surely defined “Balavariani” as “the Georgian or earliest Christian form of the story” [13: 101]. No doubt, Kekelidze’s analysis would have been fundamentally diverse if he had been familiar with the findings of Conybeare.

Finally, David Lang’s fundamental study played a decisive role [17] securing the status of “Balavariani” as the first Christianized biography of the Buddha, created on the basis of the Arabic Islamic “Bilauhar and Budasaf”. An anonymous author of “Balavariani” firmly took the status of the creator of the Buddha’s first Christianized biography.

Certain inconsistencies are distinctive for the analysis of the second major stage.

On the one hand, the author criticizes Western scientists for underestimation of Georgian culture and the personality of Euthymius the Athonite. On the other hand, when it comes to division of the roles in creation of “Barlaam and Josaphat”, he gives Euthymius the secondary role of the interlinear translator of “Balavariani” contributing a draft to the novel [16: 168].

As for the real author of the novel, according to Kekelidze that is Symeon Metaphrastes, the renovator of Greek literary language and composer of the great Greek Menologies [16: 170].

Here, the main supporting arguments were the

supposed contacts of Symeon and Euthymius in Constantinople followed by professional and friendly relations and the real metaphrastic literary style of the novel. The option of creating the novel by Euthymius independently, without the help of literary advisers, was not considered at all.

In the mid 20th century the life of Simeon Metaphrastes was studied insufficiently. Important chronological details were clarified only in recent decades.

Researchers established the most probable date of the Simeon's death (987) [11: xcix; 18: 135, 19]. Several years before he stopped literary activities, he left Constantinople and became a monk. According to the same sources, it happened most probably in 980-982 after publication of a part of the great Greek Menologies - tremendous work done by him and his literary school. And it was the half of full collection of the Menologies.

Based on the message of Eprem Mtsire, Hogel suggested that "a possible explanation for this would be that Simeon Metaphrastes fell into disgrace at the court of Basil II" [20: 188]. It should be also noted that the age of Simeon (he was born in 900) might also play a role (wherever the source is not specified, historical dates correspond to the encyclopedia Britannica). For one reason or another, work on Menologies really stopped in early 980s.

According to Efthymiadis "After the publication of Symeon Metaphrastes' Menologion (later tenth century), hagiography fell into a decline" [21]. Hogel echoes this evaluation "No rewriter after Symeon Metaphrastes attained his importance, but prose rewriting continued, to some extent to a new and less ambitious fashion. The first towering personality was Michael Psellos" [20: 189]. Michael Psellos (1018-1078) attempted to resume the work on the Menologies and "produced at least one piece of rewriting, namely his version of "Life of Auxentios" [20: 190]. The real endeavor to complete the Menologies was made by John Xiphilinos the Younger during the reign of Alexios I Komnenos (1081-1118) [19, 22: 144].

Among these facts it is worth noting that full termination of work on the Menologies is connected with the departure of Simeon. This fact suggests that within the Metafrastic literary school Simeon remained indispensable.

Thus, from the early 980s to the mid 11th century (the period fully covering the most probable period of creation the novel, 1010s, and supposedly his previous works, done before his father's death, 990s) the work on the Menologies was fully abandoned and the Byzantine Metafrastic scene was left without any serious figure.

All these circumstances preclude not only Simeon's authorship and his personal contacts with Euthymius but also the existence of any other "literary adviser" who could have taken part in creation of the great masterpiece of Byzantine literature.

In contrast to the assumption of the Simeon Metaphrastes' authorship, examination of metaphrastic features of the novel turned out very fruitful.

Kekelidze was the first to focus on the whole complex of Metaphrastic features of the novel, including its compilation character, literary style and the link to the Metafrastic life of St. Catherine (the latter fact was known before) [16: 146]. The previous approach aimed at justifying the authorship of Simeon Metaphrastes was redeveloped later by Elgudja Khintibidze for analysis of the novel's history, primarily, for clarifying the chronology and the authorship. Relevant studies and analysis of religious and political role of the novel allowed him to make a significant contribution to establishing the Euthymius the Athonite's authorship [12: 192-291, 23].

The final point was placed in the basic research of Robert von Volk [3: vii-viii, 4: 1-95].

Relying on the Thesaurus Linguae Graecae, he studied and compared in detail almost all the surviving manuscripts of "Barlaam and Josaphat" together with the vast corpus of Simeon Metaphrastes finally resolving the problem of dating and authorship of the novel.

The publication of final attribution [3-4] by “Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos” is symbolic: as if, after a decent fulfillment of the role conferred on him to hold the novel through the millennium, the great John Damascus announces to the world its real author.

Bilingual Literary Genius

In our opinion, the most reliable way to verify the literary strength of the Greek writer Euthymius the Athonite passes through the analysis of the biography and achievements of the Georgian writer Euthymius the Athonite. Moreover, there is a great deal of historical data characterizing him as the Georgian writer.

Euthymius left the native language environment in his childhood and spent the rest of his life far away from Georgia. During the hostage in Constantinople he almost forgot Georgian language, which he relearned in the Iviron Monastery. Further he maintained the language proficiency by means of communication with dozens of Georgian monks and the guests from Georgia, and also with the help of Georgian literature.

As to the achievements of Euthymius the Athonite as the Georgian writer, he renewed Georgian literary language and expanded its capacity. He renewed and expanded theological terminology and practically recreated philosophical terminology. He created the grand Georgian “Athonite’s Corpus” including more than 160 translated books. In his translations he often used compilation, did extensive exemptions and insertions. A tangible part of the de-facto library created by him represents his original literary texts.

Now let us see the estimates of his contemporaries:

“The grace of God gives us a new Chrysostom” [24: 61]. “He ripped off the veil of ignorance from the mind of ours” [24:108]. “He expanded and replenished, and decorated the Shortcomings of the language of ours” [24:333].

These estimates of his contemporaries hardly need any comments and it should be said that in the history of Georgia there is no other figure rewarded by such estimates.

“Prayer of the Holy Father our Euthymius Georgian”, the original creation of Euthymius in Georgian is also of interest. Let us look at the estimate of Kekelidze [25: 13].

“History knows such great classics as Asshur Ephrem, Basil the Great, John Chrysostom, John of Damascus, and many others, whose prayers were translated by Euthymius. However, the Euthymius prayer not only does not stand any of these down, but is above them in a comprehensive way. It combines deep religious feelings of the Christian believer, mental contemplation of the thinking human being and subtle inspiration of poetical feeling”.

It is impossible not to recall the words of Heine “The flower of the sacred poetry” saying about “Barlaam and Josahat”.

As far as we know, the history knows no other case when the literary genius and renovator of literary language was formed far from the country without genuine integration into the spectrum of native speakers. Only fantastic literary talent could afford such achievement.

By the way, we are talking about a highly developed language, with a prehistory of thousands of years of continuous evolution and centuries-old literary tradition. Long before Euthymius, the Georgians created “The Martyrdom of the Holy Queen Shushanik” (5th century) and “Balavariani” (9th century), still underestimated masterpieces of the world literature.

Now, it remains to answer the main question: how could the above fantastic literary talent develop with genuine integration into the language environment, in other words, what could reach the Greek writer Euthymius the Athonite?

Euthymius the Athonite learned the Greek language in his childhood, receiving brilliant Byzantine education at Constantinople court. He spent almost

all his life in the Greek-speaking environment, communicating with Greek people of any social or age group including top representatives of the church and the empire as well as the teachers and classmates in Constantinople and prominent scholars, theologians, Greek monks and service personnel of Athos monasteries. He became one of the greatest connoisseurs of his time in the Byzantine literature.

Thus, Euthymius as the Greek writer had much more favorable conditions for conquering the literary heights. That is why, the fantastic literary talent uncovered in the Georgian writer pronounced itself even more forcefully in the great Byzantine literature.

In support to the above said let us see the estimates of literary merits of “Barlaam and Josaphat” including the comparison with Metaphrastic artworks.

Primarily, it is worth recalling Doelger’s statement about the lack of historical figures capable to create “Barlaam and Josaphat”. In fact his statement emphasizes dramatic literary superiority of the novel in relation to the Metfrastic literature, the most sound potential competitor to “Barlaam and Josaphat” in terms of literary artistry. After all, unlike the Georgian literary background of Euthymius, Metfrastic literary school and its creators were known to Doelger very well.

Also, the appraisals of other researchers are worthy of interest.

“Euthymius is not only a scholar but also a great writer” [4: 138] (“great Byzantine writer” [11: xcvi]). “One can say that word and sentence formation in the Metaphrast are generally easier than in Barlaam novel, which in my opinion is characterized by a very large linguistic richness” [26: 135]; “Text not easily defined, but some text par excellence, tradition, and translation of traditions: not only parables or stories, not just a fabric of silk damask, spun from many crops and watered by many spinning mills, not only composed of a mosaic of quotations with wisdom, an inlay similar to those trine of stone that still adorn the ecclesiastical architecture of Imereti not away from

Kutaisi, among the green pads Georgian river side Rioni, the ancient Colchis that Herodotus considered the border between Asia and Europe” [11: xcvi].

For more complete judgment, the words of Robert Volk “very large linguistic richness”, saying about the Greek language of “Barlaam and Josaphat”, could be accompanied by a comparison of the Georgian language of “Odegos” with the “inexhaustible sea” and a note about “demonstration of the richest opportunities of the Georgian language to generate words” by Nana Chikvatia [27: 116].

As a whole, above estimates are quite weighty clearly indicating who was who in terms of ability to help improve the literary style, if the chronology would allow.

At the same time, full assessment of the literary merits of the novel is still a matter of the future. In this context, a steady epithet “the popular book,” that accompanies the novel for a millennium is characteristic.

As is known, the term “popular” reflects the favorable attitude of ordinary people, although perhaps not of the intellectual elite.

In the case of “Barlaam and Josaphat” the situation changed long before.

The matter is not just that staying “popular” for thousand years is unnatural, but the main point is that over the centuries the charmed masses were replenished by such individuals as Boccaccio, Shakespeare, Heine, Tolstoy and some others.

Hopefully, the above epithet belatedly but still will give the arena to other estimates really reflecting the role of the novel in the European literature and civilization.

Now let us touch the relations of “Barlaam and Josaphat” and Metaphrastic literature.

As is known, Metaphrasis meant reediting of the old texts, modernizing and improvement of literary style and some corrections. It could include compilation of several old texts, including texts written in different languages. Metaphrasis was used long before Simeon Metaphrastes, but he was the

most prominent figure in this field, the renovator of Greek literary language [20: 182-183].

As a Greek writer, Euthymius the Athonite belonged to the next generation, and knew very well all nuances of the Metaphrastic literary style. Before writing “Barlaam and Josaphat”, Euthymius translated eight Metaphrastic opuses that indicates not only his close knowledge of the Metaphrastic heritage but also wide access to the relevant sources [16: 168].

When creating the Athonite’s Corpus in Georgian, the literary tools were not only compilation and correction, but extensive exemptions and insertions in the original sources.

According to Miminoshvili [27], Euthymius the Athonite’s literary style can be seen in the Georgian book “Odegos (For the Faith)” [28] which provides a free compilation and translation of the works by John of Damascus, Anastasius of Sinai, Michael Synkellos. As he concludes, “Odegos”, was used not only by Euthymius in “Barlaam and Josaphat” as a collection of earlier elaborations, but also served as a literary model for the novel [27: 145].

Impressive magnitude of free translation in “Odegos” did not go unnoticed. To remedy the situation, at the insistence of the Greek clerics, new translations were made by Eprem Mtsire and Arsen Ikaltoeli. Comparison of the translations reveals more facets of Euthymius’ Creativity.

For instance, the followers sometimes allowed literary “Greekisms” [28: 139]. In contrast, the prose of Euthymius, often altering to the elevated poetry, as in the above prayer, always evolves in the natural tissue of the Georgian language [28: 137].

Despite direct competition with the new translations the book remained so popular for centuries that its manuscripts were rewritten up to the 18th century [28: 27].

Now we can go directly to the parallels with the Metaphrastic texts.

According to the supposed strategy of implementation the project “Buddha-Iodasaph-Josaphat”,

Euthymius charged the novel with literary core of new tendencies and placed it into a powerful theological protective shell [10: 146-147].

Starting with such “theologizing”, Euthymius, of course, selected appropriate sources for that. In some cases where he already had own elaborations, e.g., the above “Odegos” and the eight opuses, he used them. In other cases he used other sources. Apparently, the broad involvement of John of Damascus’s heritage was in support of the hint on his authorship [10: 146].

Among the sources to be selected, preference naturally was given to the Metaphrastic texts as the best in terms of literary style and widely available to him. Further, he edited some parts of the texts, improving the style, and borrowed unchanged when found the them acceptable, of course, not worrying about the copyright introduced thousand years later.

So, there appeared some distant, close and very close parallels between the Metaphrastic texts and the novel [26]. No doubt, Euthymius did not need any “literary adviser” in such “theologizing” of the novel.

By the way, the above strategy stood the test of time. The theological armor providing a certain type of security for centuries did not prevent the literary core from becoming a cornerstone of European secular literature, contributing to the European Renaissance and Enlightenment.

Concluding Remarks

Literary activities of Euthymius the Athonite formed the basis for the two, Georgian and Byzantine civilizational projects. The common denominator of the projects is generally known - less dogmatics, more freethinking. Scientists will have to explore the particular features providing a striking success of the projects.

Developed in hard theological framework, Euthymius’ prose always experiences the strength of this framework. If in the Georgian project he could afford going beyond these frames almost openly, in

the Byzantine project he had to act cautiously and covertly. In any case, his creations became the cornerstone of the European secular literature.

And at the end, let us try to see into the future.

In 2028 it will be thousand years after the death of Eutymius the Athonite. Plausibly, at that time the assessment of his heritage will be basically completed, and the world would give befitting honors to a key

figure of the millennial civilizational movement which penetrated the east and west by an idea of rapprochement the nations and religions on the basis of humanity and freethinking.

The millennial adventure of “Barlaam and Josaphat” enters into the concluding phase. Hopefully, the presented inferences will be useful when clarifying some features of this adventure.

ისტორია

ექვთიმე ათონელი: დიდი ორენოვანი ლიტერატურული ტრადიცია

ი. შეყრილაძე

საქართველოს ტექნიკური უნივერსიტეტი

(წარმოდგენილია აკადემიის წევრის როინ მეტრეველის მიერ)

სტატიაში გამოკვეთილია ქართული საწყისების როლი ქართულ-ბერძნულ ჰიპოთეტურ პროექტში “ბუდა-იოდასაფ-იოსაფატი”. ექვთიმე ათონელის ექსტრარადინარული ორენოვანი ლიტერატურული შემოქმედების ანალიზი საშუალებას იძლევა ნათელი მოფინოთ “ვარლაამ და იოსაფატის” ზოგიერთ მნიშვნელოვან ასპექტს, რომანისა, რომელიც ათასი წელი რჩებოდა “პოპულარულ წიგნად”, სანამ ვეროპული განმანათლებლობისაკენ მიმავალი გრძელი გზის დასაწისად გაიანერგებინა და ექვთიმეს ავტორობასაც საბოლოოდ აღიარებდნენ. ეს ფაქტი არამარტო გაუგებრობათა საუკუნეებით გახლეჩილ “ბალაგარიანისა” – “ვარლაამ და იოსაფატის” დიდ ქართულ-ბერძნულ ტანდემს ამთლიანებს, არამედ ექვთიმე ათონელის ფიგურასაც სრულიად ახალ მასშტაბს სძენს. თუმცა შეფასებათა გადახედვა მხოლოდ საწყის ეტაპზეა, ჩვენ უკვე შეგვიძლია ვიფარაუდოთ, რომ ეს პროცესი თვისებრივ სიახლეებს მოგვითმის. ექვთიმე ათონელის მემკვიდრეობის ბიზანტიური და ვეროპული კონტექსტის გაანერგვასთან ერთად, ისტორიკოსებს მოუწევთ ხელახლა გაანალიზონ მნიშვნელოვანწილად მის მიერვე ინსპირირებული XI-XII საუკუნეების ქართული ცივილიზაციური გარდევა. ახალი წახნაგით წარმოგვიდგება „ვარლაამ და იოსაფატი“, როგორც მაგალითი ქართული კულტურული პოტენციალის ბაზაზე აღმოსავლეთისა და დასავლეთის, ერებისა და რელიგიების დაახლოების ათასწლოვანი პროცესის ისტორიის იმპულსის მიცემისა.

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