

CORPVS CHRISTIANORVM

*Series Graeca*

73

*Corpus Nazianzenum*

24

STUDIA NAZIANZENICA

II

edidit

ANDREA SCHMIDT

*tiré à part*

TURNHOUT  
BREPOLS  PUBLISHERS


2010

EDITORES

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CONSILIO ET AVCTORITATE  
SOCIETATIS GOERRESIANAE  
STVDIIIS LITTERARVM FOVENDIS



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HAGIOGRAPHIC PARADIGMS IN HOMILETIC GENRE.  
ORATION 36 OF GREGORY OF NAZIANZUS  
TRANSLATED BY DAVID TBELI

Maia MATCHAVARIANI

According to Maxim Guignet, a French scholar studying the style of Gregory of Nazianzus, it is typical for Gregory to exaggerate events and happenings, which is considered to be the result of the influence of the Second Sophistic. The denunciation of Julian (*Or.* 4 and *Or.* 5) and the laudation on the Maccabees (*Or.* 15) are given as examples of such hyperbolism. Guignet argues that the denunciation as well as the laudation is caused by strong emotions – Gregory's anger and indignation in the first case, and delight and admiration in the other. It is the acuteness of feelings that conditions the exaggerations in these homilies. Gregory often makes the impression of an actor whose pathos is ordered. It is clear that the orator is eager to make the listener share in emotions not really felt by him<sup>(1)</sup>. Guignet writes that so savage and unnatural are the feelings of the characters being hyperbolic in the laudation that they provoke disgust and revolt<sup>(2)</sup>. He mentions some episodes from the homily where martyrs suffer torture as if they have found a treasure; the only fear they feel is that the tyrant would order to cease agony. The most shocking impression is given by the mother of the Maccabean youths, her fanaticism could only be characterized as absurd; she lost all motherly feelings, and the torturing of her sons brought her joy.

Guignet's categorical appraisal is caused by the misjudgment that often shows up in scientific works. This is, namely, the neglect of the factor of time. Such appraisal of Gregory's homily rests upon literary purposes and subject matters of Guignet's

(1) M. GUIGNET, *Saint Grégoire de Nazianze et la rhétorique*, Paris, 1911, p. 243 (= GUIGNET, *Saint Grégoire de Nazianze*).

(2) GUIGNET, *Saint Grégoire de Nazianze*, p. 244.

contemporary prevailing taste; he is disregarding completely the purposes and norms of the early Christian literature at the time of Gregory of Nazianzus.

As it is well known, the process of the formation of Byzantine Christian literature was greatly influenced by Classical Greek literature. As a result genres such as historiography, epistolography and encomiastic biography<sup>(3)</sup> were developed in the Byzantine literature. The writings of these genres were mainly composed according to Greek literary schemes. The influence of Classical Greek literature was especially important on the early stage of the formation of Byzantine literature. This influence is clearly felt in Gregory's works. Gregory was the first Christian writer who adjusted new Christian contents to the forms of Classical Greek literature, thus filling the old vessels with new wine<sup>(4)</sup>.

*Oration 15* follows the scheme of the genre of encomiastic biography. It begins with an introduction (*προοίμιον*) where Gregory speaks about the significance of the martyrdom of the Maccabees for Christians; after that the birth and origin (*γένεσις*) and the bringing up (*ἀναστροφή*) of the Maccabean youths are given briefly; then follows at length the deeds and virtues (*πράξεις καὶ ἀρεταί*) of the martyrs, and finally comes a long eulogy of their merits (*συγκρίσεις*)<sup>(5)</sup>. But this scheme represents the formal aspect of the work; the essence and the idea of the homily are concentrated in its most extensive part – in the scenes of the martyrdom of the Maccabees. It is just this part that transforms Gregory's homily from a homiletic

(3) See R.J.H. JENKINS, *The Hellenistic Origins of the Byzantine Literature*, in *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 17 (1963), p. 39-52; M.R.P. McGUIRE, *The Early Christian Funeral Oratio*, New York, 1953, p. vii-xxi; M.L. HEBERT, *Hesychnism, Word-Weaving, and Slavic Hagiography: The Literary School of Patriarch Euthymius (Sagurs slavistische Sammlung, 18)*, München, 1992, p. 251-258 (= HEBERT, *Hesychnism*).

(4) K. DEMOEN, *Pagan and Biblical Exempla in Gregory Nazianzen. A Study in Rhetoric and Hermeneutics (Corpus Christianorum; Lingua Patrum, 2)*, Turnhout, 1996, p. 21.

(5) On the structure of rhetorical homilies of various genres see GUIGNET, *Saint Grégoire de Nazianze*, p. 211-231; R.J.H. JENKINS, *The Classical Background of the Scriptorum post Theophanem*, in *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 8 (1954), p. 13-30.

work into a brilliant specimen of the genre of a martyrdom hagiography<sup>(6)</sup>.

One of the most important sources of hagiographic literature was the Classical encomiastic biography, especially biographies of the Peripatetic school<sup>(7)</sup>. The connection was not only formal – hagiography did not adapt only the literary scheme; the subject matter of the biographies was no less important for the development of hagiographic literature. E. Jenkins writes that biographies of famous personalities were of interest for Peripatetic scholars, because, according to them, man displays his character in his actions<sup>(8)</sup>. Plutarch, a great representative of the Peripatetic school, whose works were of great importance for developing the Christian biography<sup>(9)</sup>, writes at the beginning of his *Life of Pericles*: «Just as the eye like colors that with its blaze and delight revives and strengthens sight, so should the mind be directed to such subjects of contemplation which, giving pleasure, attract mind to the good that is its nature. The source of these subjects of contemplation is virtue, they inspire the wish to compete and imitate»<sup>(10)</sup>. Peripatetic philosophers believed that writing biographies had first of all a didactic meaning; the great deeds described in biographies had to be examples that the reader was eager to follow. The famous persons of classical biographies were characterized by the positive sides as well as by the negative sides of their characters being far from the ideal. The didactic meaning of Classical biography introduced in the Christian hagiography was turned only into a positive direction.

For Christians there existed only one such example of *mimesis* – Jesus Christ, martyred for the sins of humankind. To follow

(6) See M. SHATKIN, *The Maccabean Martyrs*, in *Vigiliae Christianae*, 28 (1974), p. 97-113.

(7) T.V. РОДОВА, *Античная биография и византийская агиография [Classical Biography and Byzantine Hagiography]*, in *Antiquity in Byzantium*, Moscow, 1975, p. 222.

(8) E. JENKINS, *Nepos – An Introduction to Latin Biography*, in T.A. DOREY (ed.), *Latin Biography*, London, 1967, p. 4.

(9) Th.J. HEFFEMAN, *Sacred Biography – Saints and their biographers in the Middle Ages*, New-York – Oxford, 1988, p. 254.

(10) PLUTARCH, *Избранные жизнеописания [Selected biographies]*, 1, Moscow, 1990, p. 284.

Christ's way (cfr *I Cor.* 11, 1)<sup>(11)</sup>, the *imitatio Christi* had become the defining and the most important object of the life of all Christians. To describe the martyrdom of the life of the persons that imitated Jesus Christ's life became that main didactic motive of hagiographic literature. Such description explained the meaning of imitating Christ to all believers and raised the urge to do the same. Martyrdom means to follow Christ; being tortured for the sake of God means the remission of sins, freeing the soul of its vile body and getting near to God. A martyr perceives the martyrdom not like a common mortal but with changed and renewed mind that has passed into a new level of consciousness. Pains brought by torture meant joy and death meant bliss. Martyrdom and death was indeed perceived in this way by Christian martyrs. This conviction soon settled itself in literature and became the obligatory *cliché* of the genre of martyrdom in hagiography<sup>(12)</sup>. The characters of all martyrs, their descriptions, were introduced according to clichés. A certain degree of hyperbolization was the necessary norm of this scheme, and the real person of a martyr was not taken into consideration. The description of the torture had two main purposes: one was the stating of the fact itself, and another was suggesting every true Christian to follow the example and merits of the martyr. Regarding these data, we have to conclude that the passages of Gregory's eulogy on the Maccabees, considered to be an unnatural and absurd exaggeration by M. Guignet, are written in the usual style making the necessary tribute to the literary genre.

Let us regard the earliest original Georgian hagiographic text, the «Martyrdom of St. Shushanik» written by Jacob Tsurtaveli in the 5<sup>th</sup> century. The martyred queen says to Jacob the priest who is aghast at seeing her miserable situation: «Do not cry for me, because this night meant the beginning of joy for me»<sup>(13)</sup>. The

(11) It is noteworthy, that the necessity of imitating the personages of the New Testament is underlined by Gregory himself in his «Epitaph on Basil the Great» (*Or.* 43, c. 76).

(12) On rhetorical clichés in hagiographic literature see HEBERT, *Hesychasm*.

(13) «ნუ სტირ ჩემთვის, რამეთუ დასაბამ სიხარულისა იქმნა ჩემდა დამს ესე», I. ABULADZE (ed.), *ძველი ქართული ავო-*

«Martyrdom of St. Abo» by Ioane Sabanisdze (8<sup>th</sup> c.) also belongs to the earliest specimens of Georgian hagiographic literature. Abo says to the Christians who came to bid him farewell: «Do not cry for me, but be happy, because I go to my Father»<sup>(14)</sup>. Another direct parallel can be drawn between the Maccabees and a Metaphrastic sermon, the «Martyrdom of the Saint Mothers Sophia and her daughters Pysitis, Elpis and Agapi»<sup>(15)</sup>. This text belongs to a much later period than Gregory's works, but it is of particular interest because its contents are close to the Maccabean story. The martyrdom of the three young daughters in front of their mother is described here. The mother, Sophia, addresses to the vicious judge: «I'll be blessed in the name of Christ whom I am sacrificed to from the very moment I was born. To him I sacrifice the fruits of my agony. We came to Rome to defend our belief until we die. And it is an honor for us to be worthy of Christ who gives us eternal life after death, and we gain the good that was promised to us»<sup>(16)</sup>. All three daughters are tortured and killed in front of their mother who witnesses their martyrdom with tears of joy and prayer like the mother of the Maccabees does. On the third day Sophia herself passes away clasping the urns with the remains of her daughters to her bosom. The examples and the parallels drawn above show that the mentioned conclusion about the extreme character of exaggerations in Gregory's homily is not acceptable.

The Denunciation of Emperor Julian (*Or.* 4) is, according to Guignet, another example of extreme exaggeration and hyperboles. Nazianzen's homilies on Julian seem to him to be a collection of enormously and extremely exaggerated facts that are brought together as proofs of the emperor's viciousness and devilment. Neither in this case can we agree with him. The homilies on Julian's denunciation are following the definite literary model, the source of which is again hagiographic literature,

*ოგრაფიული ლიტერატურის ძეგლები [Monuments of Old Georgian Hagiographic Literature]*, Tbilisi, 1964, p. 18 (= ABULADZE, *Monuments*).

(14) «ნუ სტირო ჩემ ზედა, არამედ გიხაროდენ, რამეთუ მე უფლისა ჩემისა მივად », ABULADZE, *Monuments*, p. 70.

(15) N. GOGUADZE (ed.), *ძველი მეტაფრასტული კრებულები [Old Metaphrastic Collections]*, Tbilisi, 1986, p. 344-353 (= GOGUADZE, *Old Metaphrastic Collections*).

(16) GOGUADZE, *Old Metaphrastic Collections*, p. 345.

but in this case the image opposite to a Christian martyr is given: that of a wicked and torturing tyrant – a governor or emperor. Gregory models Julian's character in accordance with the hagiographic scheme.

In Gregory's works the clichés of hagiographic genre were on the stage of their formation only, but in the times of David Tbeli, the Georgian translator of Gregory's works (end of the 10<sup>th</sup>/beginning of the 11<sup>th</sup> c.), the schemes were already defined, fully accepted and familiar. In a previous publication we tried to show to what extent Gregory followed the literary schemes and how they were used in David Tbeli's Georgian translation of *Or.* 4<sup>(17)</sup>.

Here we want to analyze the Georgian translation of Gregory's homily «On himself and to those who claim that it was he who wanted the See of Constantinople» (*Or.* 36). This homily is in fact apologetic – Gregory excuses himself before the bishops and congregation who believe that he “misappropriated” the cathedral of Constantinople. In this homily Gregory talks about himself as an ordinary man full of weakness and misjudgment. Some passages of the homily acquire a private, emotional and confessional tone so much characteristic for Gregory's poetry. How David Tbeli translated this text? He does not translate these passages at all; he rather reworks them presenting a schematic character of an ideal priest.

Thus, for example, Gregory talks about the reasons of the congregation's love for him (chap. 3). Gregory writes that the congregation loves him, besides other reasons, because of his personal virtues: «Secondly you respect me because I am not impudent, I am not theatrical and pompous; I am a mild man and modest person; I have no social intercourse with anyone and live like a hermit; to sum up, I live like a philosopher, and my love of wisdom is not artificial or acquired by cunning, but is plain and full of spirit» (*PG* 36, 268 C 12-D 4). The Georgian translator David Tbeli changes this part in the following way: «And secondly, nothing is so great or praiseworthy as quietness and mildness and not arrogance, but a person should

(17) M. MATCHAVARIANI, *ჰაგიოგრაფიული ყავიბები ჰომილეტიკაში* [*Hagiographic Paradigms in Homiletics*], in *Religion*, 1-3, Tbilisi, 2001, p. 20-36 (= MATCHAVARIANI, *Hagiographic Paradigms*).

be law and keeping silence and not seeking disturbance and riot; to sum up, he should be a philosopher loving wisdom not obtained artificially or in a civil way, but he should be spiritual and lonely»<sup>(18)</sup>.

It is interesting that David omits the first person plural pronoun *ἡμῶν* and tells the passage in the third person, the text thus making a very general impression. It is quite difficult for the reader to guess that this is Gregory's self-characterization. It is clear that David Tbeli does not think that self-praise is an appropriate or necessary thing for Gregory to do, this does not conform to Gregory's image, hence the text is generalized by the translator.

Another passage of the homily (chap. 6) is noteworthy from this point of view. Here Gregory talks about the main reason of his self-justification. He says that he himself never wanted to own the cathedral in Constantinople and that he has done nothing to get it. Gregory writes that if he had appeared in front of the congregation with some human or «mean» thoughts, or with the aim of occupying the position in the cathedral «with this gray head and limbs shriveled with old age and disease»<sup>(19)</sup>, he «would have been ashamed before Heaven and Earth, before the See and the congregation»; and each time Gregory repeats: «I would have been ashamed» (*PG* 36, 272 C 4-D 5).

This passage is divided into two parts in David's translation. In the first part Gregory talks about his appearance in front of the congregation (*PG* 36, 272 C 8). David inserts a short addition into it, explaining the reason of why Gregory agreed to become the head of the cathedral in Constantinople: «It is weakened through hard times and I endure the insult not for

(18) ხელთ მეორე ესე არს, რომელ არარაჲ ესრეთ პატიონსან არს და საქებელ, ვითარ-იგი ხიმშუდე, და არა კადნიერებაჲ და არა ურცხუენელობად, არამედ რაითა მღაბად ვინმე იყოს და მდუმარე და არა მეძიებელ შოფოთა და ამბოხებათა, და რაჲთა შემოკლებულად-რე ვთქუა, სიბრძნისმოყუარე იყოს და არა თუთ ჳეღლოვან და მოქალაქეთა წესითა მოპოვნებულ, არამედ რომელი-იგი სულიერად და განმარტებულად პატივცემულ იყოს (*St. Petersb., georg.* P-3, f. 272r (11<sup>th</sup> c.)).

(19) According to David's translation: მჳციოთა ამით და უძღუერთა ამით გუამითა, რომელი-ესე სენითაცა და ჳამითაცა შეკნინებულ არს (*St. Petersb., georg.* P-3, f. 273v).

the sake of my own glorification, but for the sake of God and your salvation »<sup>(20)</sup>.

These modifications conform perfectly to the cliché of saints in the hagiographic literature, and they also conform to the etiquette and correspond to the situation. Afterwards the Georgian translator names the things Gregory would have been ashamed of. As noted above, the phrase «I would have been ashamed» is repeated several times in the original, but this phrase seems to be unacceptable for David, so in every of these cases he exchanges the phrase by his own: «I confirm » (მე ვიწამებ).

It is clear that this homily, *Or.* 36, is transformed like the eulogy on the Maccabees and the changes are introduced with the aim of making the work closer to literary clichés. David's translation shows that Gregory's image is changed with a definite aim: David does not translate those details of the original that could humiliate the great figure of the Theologian in the eyes of the Georgian readers. Gregory's self-characterization, according to his Georgian translator, could be less clear for the readers who are living six centuries after Gregory. So David gets rid of confusing passages and tries to present Gregory's eminent figure deprived of private, realistic details, which makes the image rather schematic. Gregory's image is created by David Tbeli under the influence of the lives of Saints in accordance with the literary clichés of hagiographic literature.

We have seen above how David Tbeli creates the ideal image of a saint Father in his translation. We would now like to analyze one more episode from *Or.* 36 (chap. 1), which is also changed in the Georgian translation. The modification concerns a great heretic and a wicked person. According to the cliché of this character in hagiographic literature David aggravates the negative features of the personage. Gregory mentions the heretic Arius who found his death at the moment of saying a sacred prayer in a sacrilegious way; he was punished to a godless death of souls enchanted by him (*PG* 36, 265 B 13-C 2).

(20) უამითაცა შეკნინებულ არს, ანუ აწ რომელ ამათ შეურაცხებათა მოვიტმენ, გარნა არა დიდებისათვს თვისსა თავს-მიც ესე, არამედ ღმრთისათვს და თქუენისა ცხორებობათვს (*St. Petersb., georg. P-3, f. 273v*).

In David's translation this passage sounds differently: «As you remember, know the power of apostolic prayer that drove out the preacher of insanity from the stinky places that were like his stinky language punished that disgusting person with his disgusting death, in order that everybody knows about his fair death, so that the souls keep away from the unfair death caused by him »<sup>(21)</sup>.

The rhetorical method of using the related words of one and the same root (სიმერალე – მერალი, *stink* – *stinky*; საძაგელი – საძაგელი, *disgusting* – *disgusting*), and the insertion «so that everybody knew about his fair death» – Arius's death is more expressive and gets a character of didactic example.

The peculiarities of David Tbeli's translations characterized as being tendentious to schematization make the original Greek text simple in the translation where some interesting nuances are omitted. These peculiarities of David Tbeli's method may remind the translation conception of Euthymius the Athonite. Both translators try to make the original appropriate to contemporary readers, simplifying the translation of a complex text. But one and the same purpose does not imply the same method of the two translators' work. Euthymius the Athonite transforms the original so as to make it suitable for the reader and, as a result, the change is so complete that the translation presents an essentially new literary work<sup>(22)</sup>.

The translation of the «Epitaph for Basil the Great» (*Or.* 43) by Euthymius the Athonite (10<sup>th</sup> c.) represents an example that

(21) რამეთუ ვაგვსოვს, უწი სამოციქულოთსა მის ღოცვისა მისსა ძალი, რომელმან წინამძღუარი იგი სობორგელისა დაჰკვნა ადგილთა ღირსთა და შემსგავსებულთა სიმერალითა მერალისა მის ენისა მისისადათა, რათა საძაგელი იგი საძაგელითა შით სიკუდილითა ისაჯოს და რათა ყოველთა მიერ საცნაურ იქმნეს სიკუდილი იგი მისი სამართალი და რათა განერჩენ სულნი უსამართლოთსა მის სიკუდილისა მის მიერისაგან (*St. Petersb., georg. P-3, f. 271r*).

(22) The peculiarities of the translation method of Euthymius are analyzed in K. BEZARASHVILI, *რიტორიკისა და თარგმანის თეორია და პრაქტიკა გრიგოლ დვთისმეტყველის თხზულებათა ქართული თარგმანების მიხედვით* [K. BEZARASHVILI, *Theory and Practice of Rhetoric and Translation. A Study of the Georgian Translations of Gregory the Theologian's Writings*], Tbilisi, 2004, p. 18-98.

is parallel to David Tbeli's translation of Gregory's homily *Or.* 4, which was made up according to hagiographic clichés. The denunciation of Julian and the Epitaph for Basil were translated with the same purpose – originally homiletic works were transformed into works of hagiographic genre<sup>(23)</sup>. But the Georgian translators achieved this purpose in different ways. The changes done by Euthymius in his translation of the Greek text are vaster than in David Tbeli's translations; at the same time they are of compositional character while David Tbeli makes his changes without touching upon the main composition of the text.

As for the translation of *Or.* 36, the changes done by David Tbeli in his text are not so vast, though the translator fulfills his purpose successfully in order to relate the homiletic text to the hagiographic paradigms of his epoch.

#### ABSTRACT

The paper studies the Georgian translation of Gregory's *Or.* 36 by David Tbeli (10<sup>th</sup>/11<sup>th</sup> c.) and compares it with some similar features in the translation of *Or.* 4. The translator tries to form the images of the personalities of the homilies according to hagiographic paradigms. These images are schematized and simplified in the translation instead of showing the rich nuances which they have in the original text. The text is changed in order to fulfill the tendentious aim of the Georgian translator.

(23) T. KURTSIKIDZE, *გრიგოლ ღვთისმეტყველის XLIII პომ-  
ოლის ევთიმიე ათონელისეული თარგმანის თავისებურება*  
[The peculiarities of the translation of Gregory the Theologian's *Or.* 43 by Eu-  
thymius the Athonite], in *Philological Studies*, II, Tbilisi, 1995, p. 42-63;  
MATCHAVARIANI, *Hagiographic Paradigms*.