

# PROVERBS AND RARE WORDS IN THE LIVES OF THE SAINTS, ACCORDING TO THE METAPHRASTIC MENOLOGION (INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACH)

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## Abstract

*This paper aims to approach and examine the proverbs and rare words which are mentioned in the Lives of Saints in the Metaphrastic Menologion of 10<sup>th</sup> century, which contains 148 texts. It is important to note that the Metaphrastic Menologion is not only a Hagiographical text related to Religion, but also an informative manual for the social life, cultural customs and Linguistic issues of the era.*

*The paper focuses on the linguistic dimension, the rare words as well as the proverbs which are mentioned in it. The majority of relevant past papers try to find the intertextuality between the Metaphrastic Menologion and other hagiographical texts which are considered to be chronologically close. But only few emphasize on the case that some phrases and words were taken from texts both ecclesiastical and of ancient Greek literature, from a long time ago.*

*Our intention is to compare the different uses of some words, and phrases in the Lives of the Saints. Some of them are used only once, either in the Ancient or Religious Literature, while others have been mentioned in texts, many centuries ago. Their sources either in Ancient Greek Literature or in other previous Ecclesiastical texts are also revealed by this paper. Some examples are also given in order to have a clear view on how we could use these texts in classrooms.*

**Key words:** Saints, Hagiography, Menologion, Proverbs, Language, Linguistic, Literature

## Introduction

It is commonly accepted that Hagiographical texts inform the readers not only about issues related to religion and Sanctity, the life of a Saint, social situation and cultural customs, but they are also informative regarding linguistic issues. That is the reason for the selection of this specific topic for this paper.

The presentation is divided in two parts. The first part includes some information concerning the Metaphrastic Menologion. The second part discusses the proverbs and rare words which are found in the aforementioned book, as well as the reason that these texts are suitable for use in classrooms, either in Secondary Education, or at the Academic level.

## Part I

### The Metaphrastic Menologion

Our research data is based on a Menologion from the tenth century, which was written by Symeon the Metaphrast and is considered the "*best-attested set of hagiographical texts from Byzantium*". (Høgel. 2014, II, p. 185). It is a ten volume hagiographical collection which includes 148 texts of Passions and Lives of saints, despite the fact that it is probably an incomplete work. It is important to clarify that the term "Menologion" was attributed to this collection far later, given that it could have functioned as a liturgical collection among local churches and monasteries, and it was not considered to be Symeon's collection. This is probably the reason there is no prologue in it. Additionally, this fact is also revealed by its structure which begins from September to August, in accordance to the Calendar of the Church.

The division of the Menologion is not even, since the hagiographical texts of months November, December and January are each extended in two volumes in comparison to clusters of other months like February, March and April or May, June, July and August which are included in one volume. Finally, September and October cover one volume each.

Symeon Metaphrastes -who probably became a monk at the end of his life- was the most productive rewriter as well as the most successful producer of a hagiographical collection (Høgel. 2014, II, p. 183). He tried to improve texts

related to the life of the Saints of past centuries, either by paraphrasing the ancient texts in a contemporary style or by rewriting them. This means that he didn't change the substance of the texts, as it is commonly revealed in newest collections, but offered a more human version of saintly feats (Efthymiadis, 2011, I, p. 130)..

According to Hogel, one of the best known scholars of the Metaphrastic Menologion, only a few texts, approximately 8, are considered to be the new compositions of Symeon, at the same time that around 122 texts are rewritten versions of old hagiographical material. Moreover, 13 or 14 texts must have been taken from older collections without alterations and modifications (Høgel. 2014, II, p. 187).

### **The Metaphrastic Menologion as a Literature text**

The importance of the Metaphrastic hagiographical collection lies not only on its religious, social and cultural relevance, but also on its Literature and linguistic significance. All of these characteristics have caught the attention of Menologion scholars. Since 1938, when Zilliacus listed some important stylistic and linguistic features of the Metaphrastic texts, there have also been others who tried to reveal specific issues of this dimension.

It is mentioned that *"earlier texts were given rhetorically polished expression through the use of classical vocabulary and syntax; also Latin loan words were expunged."* (Høgel. 2014, II, p. 188) Moreover, the replacement of the vivid dialogues which are mentioned in ancient martyria with either indirect speech or long declamations, gives the opportunity to the writer to reveal the superiority of the martyr against the brutal emperor. It is important to underline that the majority of past papers try to find the intertextuality between the Metaphrastic Menologion and other hagiographical texts which are considered chronologically close to it. However, only few have emphasized the case that some phrases and words were taken by texts both ecclesiastical and of ancient Greek literature, from a long time ago.

## **Part II**

### **Proverbs and Rare Words at the Metaphrastic Menologion**

In the second part of our paper some examples will be given of proverbs and rare words which are included in the Metaphrastic Menologion as well as some indicative sources from which they were taken.

The initial results of our research on the Metaphrastic Menologion have shown that 62 proverbs and rare words are recorded in the hagiographical texts of the collection. It is crucial to clarify that some of them are mentioned only once in the Ancient or Ecclesiastical Literature, while some others are derived directly or indirectly from the Ancient Greek Literature.

#### **a. Proverbs**

The word "proverb", *"παροιμία"* in Greek, is derived, according to Basil of Caesarea from the prefix *"παρά"* and the word *"οἶμος"* (οδός) which means "street". He explains that the word "proverb" referred to some expressions which are useful to the route of our daily life. This is what is generally accepted as *"a usually pithy and familiar statement of an observation or principle generally accepted as wise or true"* (Roget's II, p. 780).

There are many notable cases falling under this category, as the examples that are mentioned in the paragraphs below:

In the text of Saint Polyeuctus there is the expression *"ἀφιλος σιωπή"* (irreconcilable silence) which is used in order to express that, in some cases, like in friendship, keeping silent is an insufferable situation. It is important to mention that this proverb is a "cum dicitum" once called (*ἀπαξ λεγόμενο*) either in the Christian or in the secular Literature.

In the Life of the Venerable Eythemius, the issue of childlessness is mentioned as crucial for the husband and wife, that make them to feel so sad that their *life* is, according to the proverb, *insufferable "βίος αβιώτος"*. This proverb which is still used in modern Greek, is first mentioned by the Ancient Greek wise man Chilon the Lacedaemon (600 -520 B.C.), as well as Aristophanes (Pluto 969) (Markantonatos, p. 56).

The text of Saint John Chrysostom at the Hagiographical collection of Symeon give us the opportunity not only to read three proverbs but also four rare words.

As once called (*ἀπαξ λεγόμενο*) either in the Christian or in the secular Literature is recorded the proverb *"παραίτιον μισθαποδοσίας"* which means that, the interpretation of the Holy Bible, is a worthy action for our soul.

The ecclesiastic proverb *"βαίνω κατ' ἴχνος"* (to track), which means that I follow somebody in his spiritual life, is first used by Origen, as well as John Chrysostom from which was probably taken in order to be used in the collection of our research.

The third proverb which is used at the text of the Life of Saint John Chrysostom is the expression: "*παρανάλωμα του πυρός*" which means that something is destroyed by fire. According to the hagiographical text, the holy vessels were destroyed by a fire. Needless to say that this proverb which is also used by modern Greeks, was taken by a book of Athanasius of Alexandria.

According to the hagiographical text of the 45 Martyrs' martyrdom, the proverb "*κακή κεφαλή*", means that somebody has the tendency not to act or repeat something properly, but to make the same mistakes over and over. This expression is also used by Greeks nowadays.

At the passion of the 7 Sleepers of Ephesus, the proverb "*εν σάκκω & σποδώ*" means that somebody "*is dressed in mourning*". The expression was taken from the Old Testament and especially by the books of either prophet Ezekiel 7, 8 or Joel 1, 13, or Daniel 9, 3 and depicts the way that Jews were expressing their grief by wearing the "sack" the official mourning (Kaimakis, 67).

#### **b. Rare words**

The classified rare words, according to the Metaphrastic Menologion of Symeon are more than 50. Our intention is not to present all these words, but to give some indicative examples following the alphabetical order for practical reasons.

The noun "*αθεμιτόγαμος*" is derived from the verb "*αθεμιτογαμώ*" and expresses the illegal marriage, according to the patriarch of Constantinople (Istanbul) Proclus. The word is even related to Astrology as it is used in the Life of Saint Demetrius, by Symeon, in order to express that a nation is not following the path of God, but it has chosen the path of idolatry and illegality, far away from God's willing.

The word "*ανάλωτος*" means that somebody or something can't be captured by another and is used twice in the hagiographical texts of Symeon, at the Passion of Anastasia of Rome and Saint Martyrs Gouria, Samona and Abibou. It should be mentioned that Plato, Herodotus and Thucydides are some of the writers of Ancient Greece, who used this word in their books.

The term "*ανομίλητος*" which means somebody who avoid to speak to others, is used once, in the Life of Venerable Xenophon. It should be underlined that the word is also rare at the secular Literature, as in the writings of Plato and Plutarch.

In the hagiographical text of Venerable Eythemius the word "*αριστήριος*" which means "the best" is used in order to express the reward for the people who have constructed a church. Additionally, the term is only used in the ecclesiastic environment. Two cases are known to us, as far as this term is concerned: The first one is related to the monk John and the second is related to Theodore of Studites.

The word "*γηροτρόφος*" attributed to those who take care and give food to the elderly, is recorded in the Life of Anastasia from Rome. Despite the fact that the term is used by Euripides and Pindar, the Metaphrastic Menologion is the only ecclesiastical text where it is recorded.

The term "*εθελοψυδής*" which means that somebody choose to say lies in his daily life, is a "once called" word either in the secular or in ecclesiastical Literature and it is used in the Action of Saint Demetrius.

At the same phrase where we find "*αθεμιτόγαμος*", the word "*ειδωλόπηκτος*" is used, in order to show that a nation followed idolatry instead of the true faith to God. The word is also used in the Life of Saint Demetrius.

The word "*εισητητός*" is mentioned at the hagiographical text of Symeon the Pillar. The significance of it, is that a place is accessible to people. Needless to say that the word is a "once mentioned" word either in the secular or in ecclesiastical Literature.

In the Life of Saint Marcellus the noun "*περιττολογία*", which means that something is useless to be said, is mentioned once either in the secular or in Ecclesiastical Literature.

The term "*περίφοβος*" is recorded at the Life of Saint Gregory, bishop of Acragantos, meaning "terrified". The Historians Thucydides and Xenophon, from Ancient Greece, are the first who used this words in their Histories. The term "*πολυαρκής*" meaning useful in many things, is used in the hagiographical text of Saint Marcianus the priest, by Symeon. It should be underlined that the term was first used by Herodotus in Ancient Greece.

Two rare words are recorded in the same phrase in the hagiographical text of Saint Spyridon which were both used for the first time in secular Literature and then, were adopted by Gregory the Theologian, bishop of Constantinople, before been recorded to the Metaphrastic Menologion.

The first one is the term "*φίλανδρος*", which means that somebody loves a man, not in a homosexual way, but as an association with him, at the level of friendship. The term was first used by Aeschylus. The second term "*φιλόχριστος*", which means that a man loves Jesus Christ, is also recorded in Gregory the Theologian, as well as at the Anthology of Palace.

One of the most characteristic rare words of the Metaphrastic Menologion is the noun "*Χριστεμπαίκτης*". The meaning of the word is that somebody choose to laugh at Jesus Christ, either in theory or by having a bad behaviour and acts against the Lord. The term which is used only in ecclesiastical literature, was first used from Theodore the Studites and is recorded also at the life of the Venerable Auxentius.

As we mentioned at the beginning, only some indicative examples of proverbs and rare words by the Metaphrastic Menologion are presented in this paper.

After all the above observations and terms, the question is how could we use these terms and texts at the teaching program at school, either in Secondary Education or at the University, in the course of Religion and Literature.

The most suitable way for this, could be the adoption of the paths we commonly use when we interpret a Literature or ancient Greek text. This means that a short introduction about the creation of the text, its writer, will guide us naturally to the original hagiographical text. Its translation either in modern Greek or in another language could be useful for the understanding of its meaning. Moreover, we could approach the text from the point of view of morphology, syntax, linguistic rules, rhetoric, and by emphasizing on the meaning of proverbs and specific rare words, in the past and nowadays. Additionally it is crucial for us to approach the context of the text, the religious, social and cultural information that are given, as well as their meaning to our contemporary society.

To sum up, the following conclusions were reached and should be pointed out:

1. The Metaphrastic Menologion is an important source not only for the information which is given to us at the level of Religion and the Life of Saints, but also as the basis of social, cultural, rhetorical and linguistic issues.
2. There are over 62 proverbs and rare words in the hagiographical texts of Symeon, some of which are still used in Greek contemporary society. Some of them are mentioned as "once called" expression and rare words in the texts, while some others were derived from the ancient Greek Literature, the Holy Bible and previous Fathers of the Church.
3. The Metaphrastic Menologion, as a multidimensional source, which could be suitable to be used in the classroom either in Secondary Education, or at the lever of Academic teaching.

### Biography

Doundoulakis Emmanouil is an Assistant Professor at the PUEAC (Department of Pastoral Studies and Department of Ecclesiastical Music), where he holds the Chair of Hagiography and Hymnology.

He holds a PhD in Theology. His studies extend from Theology (Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant) to Criminological Psychology, Journalism, Psychology and Counseling, Counseling upon Divorce, Greek Paleography, as well as Management and Marketing at Universities and Academies in Greece, in Switzerland and in France.

He is the author of twenty books (Theology, Poetry, Prose). Some of his poems were translated in English, Arabic and Chinese language and some other were set to music and were presented (as songs) in Cultural festivals in Crete.

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