

# **HISTORICAL AND THEOLOGICAL PRECONDITIONS OF THE IDENTITY OF PSEUDO-DIONYSIUS THE AREOPAGITE AND PETER THE IBERIAN**

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The article deals with a highly interesting and controversial issue related to Dionysius the Areopagite, one of the great representatives of Christian Neo-Platonism, and the identity and activity of Peter the Iberian, a well-known Georgian figure of the fifth century, flourishing abroad.

Hugo Koch, one of the researchers of Areopagite problems, expressed his critical attitude to the possibility of finding the author of the corpus areopagiticum, but the interest of the world science towards this problem has not diminished and the research continued.

There is no need of dealing with the history of various attempts in western science to solve this issue. The fact is that these researches have been going on for five hundred years and they have intensified recently.

The consideration of the significance of Peter the Iberian's expressions can be held from the narrower viewpoint – ecclesiastic-dogmatic, and a wider – historical-philosophical one. But as the "burning" issue about the authentic author is still under way, we had to keep to the narrower viewpoint of the issue.

The consideration of these issues leads us to one of the central moments: Is there a possibility to compare the places from the pseudo-Areopagite books with the concepts of Peter the Iberian, being their only and possibly the authentic author, as they have been preserved in Peter's biographies. Here different questions crop up and several can be singled out: 1) Particular viewpoint moments: teaching of virtue as absolute and unreality of evil; 2) No attainability and ineffability of God; 3) The idea of the way of attaining God; 4) Silence, quiet and mystery in the pseudo-Areopagite books and Peter the Iberian; 5) the same style of narration and the un-Greek terms, especially composites.

Buzmir, the King of Kartli, sent his 12-year-old son Murvan to Caesar Theodosius II (408-450) to Constantinople as a hostage, before the war between Persia and Byzantium (420). Murvan served as a guarantee that Georgians would not support the Persians in this war. Murvan escaped from Constantinople to Jerusalem and became a monk there. Murvan was known by his monk name Peter after that.

Peter the Iberian was famous in the whole of oriental world as a great saint and ascetic. He was the central figure of Gaza's monophysites and was highly respected. Besides being monophysite (which was not completely orthodox) and of royal descent, the Byzantine Palace protected him even during the period of monophysites' repressions. He was even called the "second Apostle Paul" and his biographers used to estimate him with the highest epithets.

After his death, his own disciples compiled The Lives. Among the biographies, which have reached us, The Life of Peter the Iberian by an anonymous author is very significant. The author wrote it in Greek and quite a voluminous part of its Syriac translation has been preserved. The anonymous author wrote The Life of Peter the Iberian in about 518. Schwartz has stated that once considered as the "anonymous author" of this work was Peter's disciple Iohannes Rufus of Antioch, his heir of the Majumi bishop throne.

The second significant monument among Peter's biographies is Plerophorien, written in Greek and survived only in the Syriac translation. Its author was also Iohannes Rufus and it is specially marked below the title: "The Plerophorien are written against Chalcedonians in 512-518".

Peter's life was also described by his another disciple Zacharias Rhetor - scholastic in Greek, who was later the bishop of Mitilen. The original and its Syriac translation were lost, only a few lines have survived.

Zacharias Rhetor also wrote the Ecclesiastic History in Greek. The Syriac translation of this work is preserved. Zachariah's information about Peter the Iberian is kept and published in the form of excerpts by a compiler in Books III and IV.

Zacharias Rhetor briefly mentions Peter in his work *The Life of Severos* (written in 512-518, that is in the period, when Rufus wrote *The Life of Peter the Iberian and Plerophorien*). Now about the Georgian sources of Peter the Iberian. In the 13th century priest Makarios of Meskheti translated it from Syriac (some parts fully and some of them abridged): *The Life and Citizenship of Peter the Georgian*. This Life in an unbound state happened to fall into the possession of a certain Deacon Paul (14th century), who "arranged the manuscript, added the preface, extended it with miracles and ended it well." The editor himself marked all this in the colophon, which Makarios of Meskheti added at the end for the Georgian edition.

Unlike the Syriac one, the Georgian text has three colophons of: 1. Zachariah of Georgia 2. Makarios of Meskheti 3. Deacon Paul. These colophons give the information about the history of the writing of the work, its alteration and arrangement (restoration). Makarios' work lacked the ending, which Paul completed. But it is not clear what ending was missing: Maybe the text lacked the end of the main narration, in which Peter's funeral was described and Deacon Paul completed it; or maybe Zachariah's colophon was damaged and he restored it? Or "well completed" meant Paul's colophon. To cut it short, it needs further study in order to adequately assess the scientific value of the historical-biographical data. While comparing the Syriac and Georgian texts, it appeared that the damaged original, which was available to Paul, lacked the very part in which the mourning after Peter's demise and the ceremony of his burial was described, which are differently presented in the Syriac and the Georgian translations. According to the Georgian one, Peter died on December 2 on Friday at the age of sixty-five and in the Syriac version he died on December 1 on Friday, at the age of about eighty and was buried on December 2. Such a difference would not have occurred in the translator's text. It clearly points to Paul's work. If the present end of the Georgian ending had been supplied by Makarios, it would have undoubtedly coincided with the content of the Syriac ending of the Life. As the years and facts in the original and translation are different, it proves that in the Georgian variant Deacon Paul "completed it well" without the Syriac variant and he himself added to the text the colophons of Zachariah, Makarios of Meskheti and his own one".

A very interesting feature is revealed in the comparative study of the Georgian and the Syriac versions. "The Syriac text of the anonymous author (Rufus) cannot be the original of the Georgian translation, yet it does not exclude the possibility that they had much in common. Indeed, without considering the volume, the similarity at first sight is so surprising that it is seemly to consider the Georgian text to have been taken from the Syriac Life by the anonymous author. It is not necessary to point out the similarities, just the opposite, we will indicate the differences and especially those ones, which make it impossible to consider the dependence of the Georgian text on the Syriac one". According to N. Marr, the Syriac text of Peter's Life is not the original of the Georgian text. Therefore there existed another Peter's Life and it might exist somewhere. The contemporary of the saint and the author of Isaiah's Life, named Zachariah made it." "It appears that the anonymous author knew Zachariah personally or according to his Peter's Life. Actually this Zachariah might have been his source".

This supposition can be considered. The Georgian and the Syriac versions of Peter's Life could have had a common source. The Biography written by Zachariah was variously treated and developed by Georgian and foreign researchers. I. Javakhishvili: "It might be supposed that the Syriac altered Life and Makarios of Meskheti – the translator of *The Life of Peter the Georgian* had the same original. This circumstance enables a researcher to restore the significant historical content by the comparative study of the Georgian translation of "Peter the Georgian's Life" and the altered Syriac text. Sikorski: "The author must have used the Life, written by Zacharias Rhetor in Beirut." Bardenhever: *Saint Peter's Life in Georgian* comes from a later period. Evidently it was based on the Georgian translation of the Syriac text, written by an anonymous Greek biographer".

The coincidence of the passages of the two monuments often occurs independently and is due to the thematic similarity, therefore not the similarity, but the difference requires a special study.

In order to determine the relationship between the Syriac and the Georgian editions of Peter's Life it is crucial to state both, the similarity and the difference. As the subject of the both versions is Peter's life and his citizenship, they coincide by content, but certain episodes are often different by their motif. If we consider this issue from this viewpoint, a number of facts will be revealed, which will enable us to make an unbiased judgment. Here the preventing obstacle appears to be the fact that the Syriac Life is altered and the Georgian version by Makarios of Meskheti has not reached us. Therefore we possess only the text restored by Deacon Paul. This text lacks certain parts due to the faults in the original and some parts were added thanks to the restorer.

The compilation of Makarios and Paul's texts is not "the translation-alteration" of the Syriac text of Peter's Life by Rufus, as it is "extended" and "altered" especially by Deacon Paul. It contains certain data by Zacharias Rhetor and some Georgian traits. But very important passages by Rufus' composition in some cases directly and in others mostly extended or very abridged) certainly came from the Syriac original into Georgian. They are seen in the parallel places. I have translated the Syriac text completely. A number of details have been defined more precisely. It is enough to give the comparison of the translated parts of the book by the anonymous author (Rufus) with the Georgian monument. Here we would like to note that the origin of certain passages of these two works is different and can be explained by the fact that Deacon Paul, who edited and completed this work, had an unbound manuscript in his possession, therefore in his version the order of the original version's real state is lost.

It is absolutely clear that almost all the principal episodes of the Life by Makarios depended on the Syriac translation of Peter's Life by the anonymous author (Iohannes Rufus). It is evident for the reader how Makarios and especially Deacon Paul interpreted the passages by Rufus in a Georgian way. Iohannes Rufus writes about the vision of Peter's godfather Iohannes about the Second Coming, how the God appeared, surrounded by angels. Rufus described the march of angels in such a way, that it made Sh. Nutsbidze and E. Honigmann see the reflection of the angels' three triads, created by pseudo-Dionysius of Areopagite (5th c.). Pseudo Dionysius presented the divine powers in three triads (9 ranks) in his treatise on The Divine Hierarchy. This work by Dionysius evidently influenced Rustaveli. The third part, The Paradise of La Divina Commedia by Dante is fully based on the above-mentioned book by Dionysius Areopagite– the triad of the angels' chorus.

Iohannes Rufus wrote down the oral narration of Iohannes the Laz about the vision of the God (about the Second Coming), the abridged version of which is repeated by Makarios and Paul in the Life. The coincidence is apparent. The deviations were undoubtedly due to the fact that Makarios (?) abridged them. This datum is crucial – the brilliant passage by Rufus is abridged in some places of the translation, the march of the angels triad is not adequate, etc.

In his book E. Honigmann remarks referring to Iohannes's vision about the Second Coming (based on the edition by N. Marr), narrated by Rufus: "The same vision is narrated in the Georgian version of Peter's Life. This version must be fully based on the Syriac Peter's Life, or its Greek original". The Greek original by Rufus is not seen and Makarios' Life is translated from Syriac (Makarios specially points out to it). The passage about the God's vision in the Georgian version can be considered only after comparing it with the translation of Rufus' work. E. Honigmann's remark ("must be") is not justified in any way, moreover, it is surprising how it appeared in his research, as Honigmann knows N. Marr's work very well.

But the character of Makarios' "alterations" is not yet over. It was N. Marr who noticed that the translator of the Life" into Georgian gave the reconstruction of Peter's religious belief as well according to his epoch: monophysite Peter is presented as Chalcedonian in the Life.

Peter the Iberian left Constantinople before the victory of the Chalcedone party in the capital. . The reign of Markian (452 – 457) is the period of Dyophysites' triumph and the following years of the so-called Orthodox. In Makarios' translation of the Life the Chalcedonians are presented as the only true Christians, Emperor Markian is also praised.

Thus Peter is presented as Chalcedonian and the monophysites threatened to kill him for it. And Peter was monophysite!!!

It is clearly illogical and historically false. It must have been the result of the Georgian compilation of Iohannes Rufus' composition, in order to comply Peter's life and his religious credo with the Georgian Dyophysite Church. It is impossible to give a different explanation.

It is clear why the Georgian translator avoids the theological places, given in the Syriac text of the anonymous author: The Georgian religious men of the 13th – 14th centuries (Makarios and Paul) could not have been the propagators of "anti-Orthodox" (monophysite) ideas. They "cleared" the text in their own way and completed it. Therefore N. Marr should not have been surprised that "In the remaining part the Georgian and Syriac texts do not quite cover each other". Why the Syriac and Georgian texts do not fully coincide is quite apparent.

Here are the examples of differences between the Syriac and the Georgian texts which are quite expected, as Makarios' "translation" could not have been adequate to the Syriac text by the anonymous author either in religious respect or by the viewpoint of the absolute coincidence of sequence of certain episodes. It is not convincing either (by linguistic approach) that "the Syriac text is not the original, which was in the possession of the Georgian translator Makarios."

Makarios of Meskheta is not only the person who altered, extended in certain places and abridged the Syriac translated text of Peter's Life. Sometimes Makarios translated the Syriac text almost without any changes. There are exact parallels from Makarios' work, presented in this research, that is, in certain passages the Georgian Life gives the anonymous author's text unchanged, so Makarios basically depends on this author's text. But the Georgian text is damaged by later translator (13th c.) and further more by the editor of the translation (15th c.)

In the 13th century it was impossible to translate an original in the foreign language more precisely. In this research we have presented similar parallels. After completely translating the Syriac text into Georgian the similar coincidences have clearly appeared.

Thus it is wrong to say that Makarios' Georgian edition of the Life presents only the general content of the Syriac text by the anonymous author. It is not so, as Makarios directly translates certain passages of the Syriac text in a number of cases, according to the translation technique of the 13th century.

Due to the above-given consideration the Georgian translation without comparing it with the Syriac text of the Life is not enough to state Peter the Iberian's debatable biographical facts and his religious belief. True, the Georgian one differs from the Syriac source, but it would be wrong to underestimate it. The comparative study of the Georgian and the Syriac Life makes it possible "to restore a significant historical part". Moreover, the Georgian variant of "the Life" preserves certain significant data, which clarify the vague issues of the Syriac one, in the first place the identity of the author of this composition, his relationship with Peter the Iberian and so on, which is another issue to be researched.

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