

Cultural-Religious Context of Translation Style. On Euthymius Atoneli's Translations

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Abstract

This article discusses the original translation style of St. Euthymius the Athonite (10th-11th centuries), a great Georgian monk working in the Iviron Monastery of Athos (Greece), which was called an 'omission-addition style' in the scientific literature, and was entirely conditioned not by linguistic but by cultural-religious context. The main goal of the article is to examine that unique phenomenon we are dealing with in the form of his translations, that sheds light on how a translator may turn linguistic tools into cultural vectors of a society, a country, determining the main path for spiritual and intellectual development of the nation in a particular historical epoch and along the centuries.

From the rich Greek theological literature, Euthymius the Athonite selected for translation those works that would best reflect the knowledge accumulated in that field at the time, and presented them to Georgian readers, still less knowledgeable in theological matters, in such a way that would best suit them and strengthen their Christian faith, on the one hand, and introduce them to the advanced Western thought, on the other. Research focus is on the translations of theological content. Based on the comparative analysis of the Greek-Georgian texts, I examine those methods and means that Euthymius the Athonite used to keep the Georgian nation from possible religious threats, misunderstandings, and difficulties that accompanied the misinterpretation of religious texts in the Middle Ages. Euthymius the Athonite laid a solid foundation for the process of Europeanization of Georgian literature and culture, which his descendants continued with dignity.

Keywords: *Euthymius the Athonite, omission-addition style, translations, cultural-religious context, Greek theological texts*

Introduction

According to Georgian historical sources, as a result of St. Nino's preaching, the Kingdom of Kartli, like the Roman Empire, adopted Christianity in the 4th century, which led to the construction of churches and the establishment of religious services. In order to carry out the ecclesiastical rites without hindrance, the relevant biblical and prayer texts were initially translated into Georgian. However, in addition to the spiritual ascetics, the theologians working in the monastic centres,

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which were established later inside or outside the country, paid special attention to rendering the Greek-language theological works of the Church Fathers into Georgian, since they were fully aware that, in the absence of patristic literature in their mother tongue, the nation's religious teaching and spiritual education would be impossible.

Iviron Monastery was one of the monastic centres of special importance, founded by Georgian figures on Mount Athos in the 10th century, where the son of one of its founders, St. John of Athonite – the worthy Euthymius Mtatsmindeli (10th-11th centuries) –, shone with his invaluable spiritual mission. The offspring of his translation activity – old Georgian ecclesiastical literature – is an invaluable treasure of the Georgian nation.

Noteworthy is the figurative assessment of the great theologian, St. Ephrem the Minor (11th century), in which he addressed the literary creations of our ancestors with a unique syntagmatic term, “Georgian cart”, and named St. Euthymius the Athonite as the person who added the most of “sheaf” to the “cart” (i.e. translations from ancient Greek into Georgian), thus showing the importance of Father Mtatsminda in Georgian culture (Metreveli 1998).

Although the list of figures translating from ancient Greek into Georgian is quite impressive, Euthymius the Athonite is the only and exceptional person to whom the same Ephrem the Minor gave a special assessment when he said: “He, by the grace of the Holy Spirit possessed the ability to add and omit texts” (Raphava 1976: 67).

The style, which was called “addition-omission” in the Georgian scientific literature by Ephrem, perfectly reflects the extraordinary principles of Euthymius' literary activity. In particular, when translating the Greek theological work, he often gives extensive explanations of certain sections, thus expanding them without any reference to himself and becoming a co-author of someone's works for Georgian readers. These passages merge so naturally with the composition of the Greek texts that it is impossible to comprehend the content of the original sources used by the translator with precise accuracy only by getting acquainted with the Georgian manuscripts, without comparative analysis of the Greek-Georgian texts and studying the interrelationships. In the creative works, on the other hand, there are many cases in which he skips a number of sections while translating Greek treatises into Georgian, leaving them without any translation. By doing so, the Georgian version, unlike the original, is provided to the

reader in an abbreviated form, which, like the above-mentioned, makes it impossible to get acquainted with the content of the ancient Greek texts with precise accuracy. It should be noted that Euthymius' literary activity was not limited to translating from Greek into Georgian but, in some cases, he also translated texts from Georgian into Greek. The information about this is preserved in the great Synaxarion of Giorgi Mtatsmindeli (Dolakidze and Dali Chitunashvili 2018: 238).

The translation style of 'addition-omission' and its basis

This section gives relevant examples and discusses several cases of "addition" or "omission" characteristic of Euthymius the Athonite's literary style.

The first example would be St. John Chrysostom's *Explanation of the Gospel of Matthew* (for Greek text see Migne 1862: T. 57, 21-472; Migne 1862: T. 58, 472-794). The old Georgian translation by Euthymius the Athonite contains a remarkable statement of how the first image of Jesus Christ was created in the history of mankind. In particular, the exegetical source mentioned comments on the section of the Gospel of Matthew, where the doctrine about the bleeding woman is conveyed. The events unfold as follows: The twelve-year-old daughter of the synagogue ruler, Jairus, is afflicted with a serious illness. The father of the child decides to go to Jesus Christ as soon as possible and to address him with a request. An extremely upset parent falls at the feet of the Saviour, tells of his troubles, and invites the "Teacher" to come to his house in order to miraculously save the girl who is on the verge of death. The evangelists tell us that, on the way to the house of Jairus, a woman who has been bleeding for twelve years approaches from behind, with unwavering heartfelt joy has hopes for Jesus, and touches the hem of his garment. She hears the answer: "Do not be afraid, daughter, for your faith has healed you" (Matt. 9:22). The corresponding result is also indicated there: "and the woman was healed from that moment" (Matt. 9:22).

The Georgian translation of the work of John Chrysostom is accompanied by an extensive explanation, the concluding part of which, in the last paragraph, reads as follows:

For she did not appear an ungrateful woman, but went to her own house, and because the word comes from the true teachers, in her own house she first created an icon of the Saviour and worshiped him every day of her life (Shanidze 2014: 465).

According to the quoted Georgian translation, after the bleeding woman was healed, as a sign of gratitude, she created the earliest icon of Jesus Christ in her house and worshiped until the end of her life. This statement, according to the commentator of the Holy Scripture, is a true teaching expressed by other confessors, which the author provides in his own explanation.

The fact is that the very section of the old Georgian text (the last paragraph) in which one finds the statement about the creation of the first image of the Messiah by a woman cured of bleeding, does not appear in the Greek text of the explanation of the Gospel by John Chrysostom (for comparison, Migne 1862). Correspondingly, while translating this part of the original work of the Holy High Priest, Euthymius the Athonite applied his characteristic free translation, in particular, the so-called “addition”, and added the mentioned story to Chrysostom’s explanation. Thus, the above reference does not belong to John Chrysostom, but rather echoes a well-known and widespread fact of Euthymius’ era. (10th-11th centuries).

Let us recall that one of the earliest images (mandylion) of the Saviour’s face is presented to us by an apocryphal work known as the “Epistle of Abgar”. It tells the story of the correspondence between the ruler of Edessa and Jesus Christ, about how ailing Abgar, who had heard of numerous miracles performed by Christ, wanted the Saviour to come to the city of Edessa, heal his illness, and take refuge among the wrathful Jews in Syria, to which the Lord addressed an epistle to King Abgar, promising to send the apostle Thaddeus in future. When the ruler of Edessa, full of love for Christ, heard that the Jews were going to kill the “teacher”, he immediately sent a “messenger and a skilled painter” to Jerusalem. Despite numerous attempts, the artist was unable to depict the face of God on the canvas, after which he took someone else’s advice and presented the canvas to the Lord himself. The Saviour washed his face and dried his face with a canvas, and the image of Jesus miraculously appeared on the cloth. The Lord handed over the mandylion to the apostle Thaddeus and ordered him to take it to Edessa. After the ascension of Christ, Thaddeus headed for Syria. On the way, the apostle went to the city of Hierapolis; at night, while sleeping, he placed the icon between the clay tiles, and the image on the mandylion was miraculously imprinted on one of the tiles, which the ruler of

Hierapolis kept with him; the apostle brought a canvas of God's image to Abgar in Edessa.

The two miraculously created icons above are considered to be the earliest images of the Saviour, although according to St. Euthymius the Athonite, who in turn points to other Church Fathers and considers the confirmed statement to be an undoubtful truth (for comparison, "As the word comes from the true teachers"), the first image of Christ was created by a woman who was healed of a bleeding disease, whom St. John of Damascus called "Paneadel Bleeding" (αιμορροουσα Πανεαδος) (Migne 1864: 1373).

This statement is quoted in the third speech written by the said priest in defense of the icons, in which the worthy John collects many references described in earlier epochs to testify the truth of worshipping the icons. One of the stories preserved in the "Ecclesiastical History" by Eusebius of Caesarea in the eighteenth chapter of the seventh book is entitled "About the statue erected by the bleeding woman" (for comparison, in Greek, Περὶ τοῦ ἀνδριαντοῦ οὗ ἡ αἱμορροουσα ἀνεστήσεν) (Migne 1857: 680). According to the narration, after the healed woman returned to her house, she, full of the utmost gratitude, created an image of the Saviour to express her deference. In the work of John of Damascus, the relevant section reads: "It was said that the statue (τοῦ ἀνδριαντα) had an image of Jesus (εἰκὼν Ἰησοῦ)" (Migne 1864: 1373). Here we refer to the corresponding section in Kotter's critical edition, in which the term "Lord" is used to define the personality of Jesus: "The statue is said to have had the image of the Lord Jesus (τοῦ κυρίου)" (Kotter 1975: 173).

The same information is preserved in the Acts of the VII World Ecclesiastical Assembly (787). During the 4th session, the relevant passages from the Holy Scriptures and the works on icon worship of the representatives of the Church were read aloud before the congregation. One such statement was extracted from the explanation given in the Gospel by St. Antipater of Bostra (5th century) regarding a bleeding woman. According to the priest of Bostra, after the woman was cured of her illness, she "erected the statue (ἀνδριαντα) to Christ" (Hardouin 1714: 169).

Let us note that the special attention paid to this event and the actualization of all the above-mentioned sources are not related to the work epoch of John Chrysostom (4th-5th centuries), but to the 8th century, for it was at this time that the Church Fathers sought and cited examples

from earlier, apostolic times in order to overthrow the heresy of iconoclasm in Byzantium and to testify to the truth of icon worship. Thus, when translating the definition of the Gospel of Matthew, Euthymius the Athonite, an ecclesiastical sources expert, refers to this “addition” and offers an important theological or historical event – the origin of the first image of Jesus Christ, unheard of in the Greek text of Chrysostom to Georgian readers who were still unaware of many theological matters and required catechetical study. On the other hand, Euthymius the Athonite makes the most important change and replaces the word “statue” (Greek *ανδριας*), which is identical in all Greek sources (Relevant works of Eusebius of Caesarea, Antipater Bostrell and John Damascene, Acts of the Seventh World Assembly) with the term “icon” (Greek *εικων*) in his translation. Such a terminological interpretation of the historical fact is, of course, based on a specific reason.

The fact is that, according to the scientific literature, it was in the iconoclasm era (8th century) that the Eastern Church finally rejected the veneration of sculpture, and after the restoration of iconoclasm, Eastern ecclesiastical art never returned to the ancient tradition of sculpture (see Bury 19). Therefore, while translating the explanation of the Gospel of Matthew by John Chrysostom, with the purpose of educating readers in the ancient origins of church art and the worship of sacred images, Euthymius the Athonite refers to “addition” and accomplishes the exegetes of the high priest of Constantinople with the most important information preserved in the Greek patristic texts, but with the essential difference that he changes the narrative about the depiction of the statue by a woman cured of sickness, and considers that she created not a sculpture, but an icon (cf. “She first created an icon of the Saviour in her house”). In this way, Euthymius the Athonite adjusts the history preserved in the Greek sources to a full terminological-content correspondence with the tradition of the Eastern Church of the 10th-11th centuries in the Georgian translation.

In what follows, an example of the so-called “omission” will be reviewed. First of all, it should be noted that Euthymius the Athonite is the author who first translated the “Book of Revelation” of John the Theologian into Georgian with the commentary of Andrew of Caesarea-Cappadocia (Imnaishvili 1961), who attaches an explanation worth linking to the sign of the beast mentioned by the High Priest John the Evangelist – 666. In particular, according to the worthy Andrew, the

named number will mysteriously reveal the doctrine of the supposed names of the Antichrist, and there is an extensive list there as well: Λαμπετις, Τειταν, Λατεινος, κακος οδηγος, αληθης βλαβερους παλαια βασκαντος, αμνος αδικος (Migne 1863: 681).

The mentioned names, according to Andrew of Caesarea-Cappadocia, are grouped into two parts. First, Λαμπετις, Τειταν, Λατεινος, since the sum of the numbers of the constituent letters of each word is 666 (for example, Λαμπετις: Λ=30, α=1, μ=40, π=80, ε=5, τ=300, ι=10, ζ=200; Sum: 666; Τειταν: Τ=300, ε=5, ι=10, τ=300, α=1, ν=50; Sum: 666; Λατεινος: Λ=30, α=1, τ=300, ε=5, ι=10, ν=50, ο=70, ζ=200; Sum: 666). The second part of names in the same work describes the personal characteristics of the Antichrist: κακος οδηγος - "Evil-minded leader", αληθης βλαβερους - "True evildoer", παλαια βασκαντος - "Old evil zealot" (i.e. a tireless opponent of all good), αμνος αδικος - "Unfair lamb", and, according to Andrew, this is what the Antichrist is called because of the multifaceted iniquity he has revealed.

The Andrew-like exegesis attested above in the translation of Euthymius the Athonite is quoted in one sentence:

His (Antichrist's, I.O.) true name will be revealed by time, because if his name had to be revealed, his viewer (the author of the Book of the Revelation, Apostle John, I.O.) would reveal it, but God did not want the evil name to be written in the divine book) (Imnaishvili 1961: 81).

Thus, the extensive list presented by the high priest of Caesarea in two parts, the first of which is supposed to reveal the names of the Antichrist, and the second shows his spiritual wickedness, was not reflected in the Georgian translation at all. Respectively, Euthymius the Athonite applied "omission" in the present case and offered the most reduced and paraphrased version of the Greek original to the Georgian-speaking reader, which, in our view, can be explained as follows: Since the doctrine of the second coming of Jesus Christ is one of the most prominent theological issues in the Scriptures, ecclesiastical leaders often drew attention to it in their sermons to the congregation. It is a well-known fact that John Chrysostom, the greatest authority in the Church history, considered the date of his second coming to be the period of his activity.

Accordingly, a certain group of people interested in biblical issues showed an excessive, unhealthy interest in eschatological events

at all times and in all eras, one of the sharp manifestations of which was the arbitrarily expressed views about the personality of the Antichrist.

Thus, Euthymius the Athonite, when translating the work of Andrew of Caesarea-Cappadocia, reduced exactly that passage which offers an extensive list of the names of the Antichrist, which no longer allowed the people to get acquainted with the exegetics presented in a specific form in the Greek original and to draw wrong conclusions. Consequently, when reading the Georgian text of general content, they could not interpret the underlined theological issue at their own discretion.

At this point, a new issue is brought forth, attempting to make the original translation style of Euthymius the Athonite even clearer. First of all, it should be noted that the trilogy – *The Source of Knowledge* (Migne 1864: 521-1228), the first work of which is called *Dialectic* (Migne 1864: 521-676), the second – *On Heresies* (Migne 1864: 677-788), and the third one – *An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, belongs to John of Damascus (See Migne 1864: 789-1228). It was in this last book that the worthy John collected the dogmas of the Christian Church (as the title suggests), systematically arranged them, and divided them into 100 chapters.

It is noteworthy that Euthymius the Athonite did not neglect the above-mentioned works of John of Damascus, and in order to educate the Georgian reader in dogmatic theology, translated one book – *An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith* – because it made it possible to find a specific dogmatic issue in accordance with to the relevant title, and would introduce the interested people to the ecclesiastical law: Christian dogmas.

A completely original and unique phenomenon is presented to people studying Euthymius' translation. The thing is that the Athonite figure added certain most significant features to the work of John of Damascus: 1. He changed the title and called it *The Guide* instead of *An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith* (Tchkonia and Chikvatia 2007). 2. Instead of the one hundred chapters of John of Damascus, the text by Euthymius is reduced by three quarters and only twenty-five chapters are presented; 3. The translation of the remaining part (twenty-five chapters) is based on the "addition-omission" principle, and the passages, which Euthymius expands, are filled with teachings from other works by John of Damascus, as well as with relevant teachings from the works of a number of other ecclesiastical authors.

We will focus on one specific section as an example. In particular, the Athonite figure discusses an important theological issue: Did the divinely named people of the Old Testament era know that the consubstantial God is at the same time triune, because according to biblical teaching, it was at the Jordan River, where Jesus Christ was baptized (i.e. in the New Testament), that the Trinity was proclaimed? Commenting on this event, Euthymius the Athonite points out in the Guide that, although the baptism of the Saviour performed in the Jordan was called the “Declaration of the Trinity”, even the righteous ones who came to the fore before Christ possessed knowledge about the triune of God.

In the given case, it is noteworthy that the work of John of Damascus (abbreviated *The Exposition*), which Euthymius translated, says nothing about this issue. Consequently, the first source of the teachings referred to by the Father of Mtatsminda is not the dogmatic guide of the Damascus preceptor, but some other ecclesiastical text. An in-depth study of the patristic literature makes it clear that the discussion by Euthymius of the proclamation of the Trinity in the Old Testament era is a doctrine well-preserved in the famous work of the great Father of the Church, Anastasius Sinaita (7th century) – *The Guide*, which is literally repeated by the Athonite figure without any reference to Anastasius (Chikvatia, Raphava and D. Shengelia 2015: 163). Thus, Euthymius the Athonite offers the Georgian readers, on the one hand, a processed-simplified version of *The Exposition* by John Damascus and, on the other hand, a compilation version enriched with relevant comments from other ecclesiastical authors, thus revealing his original translation style. Euthymius the Athonite translated the 42nd word of Gregory the Theologian, entitled *Farewell word to the one hundred and fifty bishops* (see Migne 1858: 457-492). The homily is a farewell uttered by a Nazianzel in front of the parishioners, on his resignation from the cathedral of Constantinople, the translation of which represents a rather extensive anti-Nestorian doctrine. The issue is presented in such detail that six printed pages are devoted to it in the Georgian language publication.

It is well-known in the history of the Church that the Nestorian heresy arose in the first half of the fifth century and was anathematized at the Third World Ecclesiastical Council (431 AD). Subsequently, while reading Euthymius’ translation of the fourth-century Cappadocian High Priest Homilia, one may note that the first feeling of surprise and

uncertainty was at the question how or why Gregory the Theologian spoke of an issue that was not on the agenda and was not the subject of an ecclesiastical dispute. However, it is enough to compare the Georgian text with the original for this ambiguity to disappear be solved. The fact is that the anti-Nestorian doctrine, which is clearly defined the original (in the Greek-language homily of Gregory of Nazianzus), is nowhere to be found and it was added to the Georgian translation by Euthymius, because he believed that Nestorianism – anathematized by the world congregation of Ephesus through the efforts of its secret followers, a few centuries later, this time in a different form and content – was still trying to penetrate the church. In order to avoid this danger, Euthymius expanded the work of the great Georgian theologian Grigol Nazianzeli and provided the Georgian-speaking reader with the doctrine of Nestorian lies, which, without comparison with the original, immediately made him the most authoritative man in the history of the Church.

Conclusions

In his translation, Euthymius Mtatsmindeli was not guided by willfulness, his own personal views and wishes, but by a specially chosen style, the so-called “omission-addition”, due to the religious situation in the Georgian nation of his time. The confessor, who cared about the people in spiritual infancy, while translating Greek texts into Georgian, did everything in his power to avoid possible religious dangers, misunderstandings, or difficulties for Georgian readers who were uneducated in profound theological matters and were still immature spiritually. Thus, according to the same Ephrem the Minor, Euthymius paved the way for the figures of later epochs (including Ephrem himself) to feed the Georgian nation, that has reached spiritual adulthood with the aid of access to difficult theological terminology and original texts translated with meticulous accuracy.

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