

Reading and Commenting Gregory the Theologian: Davit Tbeli's Translations

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Abstract: In the intellectual tradition of the Middle Ages, translation was often conceived as an exegetical process rather than a purely linguistic operation. This article examines such an interpretive approach through the Georgian translations of Gregory the Theologian produced by the 11th-century Georgian translator Davit Tbeli. Although Davit does not provide explicit commentaries, his translations reveal a consistent interpretive stance expressed through additions, omissions, paraphrases, and lexical choices. These interventions reflect his understanding of the theological content of the source texts and their intended reception by a Georgian audience.

The study reconstructs Davit Tbeli's activity on the basis of manuscript evidence and situates his work within the broader context of Georgian translation practices, particularly in relation to Euthymius the Hagiorite. While sharing the general aim of making complex texts accessible, Davit adopts a more restrained method, remaining closer to the Greek original. His consistent handling of theological terminology and biblical quotations positions him as a transitional figure between the Athonite and later Hellenophile translation traditions, and as an important stage in the development of Georgian theological-philosophical vocabulary.

Keywords: Byzantine–Georgian literary relations; Gregory of Nazianzus; interpretive translation; theological terminology.

In the intellectual framework of the Middle Ages, translation was not simply a linguistic operation but was often understood as a form of exegesis – a process through which a learned mediator interpreted an authoritative source text and rearticulated it in a way appropriate to a new linguistic, cultural, and theological setting. This understanding of translation as interpretation – or even transformation – was especially prevalent in the transmission of patristic and other doctrinal writings, where fidelity to the text often coexisted with, or even demanded, an active hermeneutic engagement.

The seminal voice in shaping this conception was St Jerome. In his *Letter to Pammachius* (Ep. 57), Jerome distinguished between *verbum e verbo* (“word-for-word”) and *sensum de sensu* (“sense-for-sense”) translations, explicitly favoring the latter, especially in rendering sacred or rhetorical texts. His defense of a freer translation strategy, grounded in the translator’s discernment of the *intentio auctoris*, would resonate profoundly throughout the medieval period. Jerome’s vision situated the translator not simply as a linguistic technician but as an exegete – one who reads and interprets through the very act of rewriting.¹

This model of translation as a commentary-in-action gained particular traction in monastic and theological contexts, where the boundaries between reading, translating and teaching were fluid.

In the Christian East, where patristic texts were not only preserved but also mediated through layered traditions of commentaries, the translator’s freedom to paraphrase, reframe, or interpolate could be understood as a form of implicit commentary.

¹ Hritzu 1965: 114–138 (*Letter 57*).

In the Georgian ecclesiastical tradition, this approach is also evident. In many cases, especially in the 11th century, the translator's interpretive stance is embedded in the very fabric of the translation itself. Choices of omission, addition, paraphrase, or lexical nuance may reflect more than stylistic variation; they offer insight into how the translator understood the source text, its theological emphases, and its proper reception by the targeted readers. In such cases, the translation *is* the commentary.

This view aligns with a broader medieval understanding of translation as an interpretive act – a process in which the translator assumes an exegetical role without explicitly presenting it as such. In this model, translation is not limited to reproducing the form of the original; rather, it involves re-creating its meaning in a manner appropriate to a new audience and context. The translator becomes both mediator and teacher, guiding readers through the theological, rhetorical, and emotional layers of the text, and shaping their reception of its message. Within this context, the 11th-century Georgian translator Davit Tbeli, through his renderings of Gregory the Theologian, offers a thoughtful example of how the theological meaning and rhetorical artistry of patristic speech could be carried into another language. Although Davit does not provide any overt commentary on the homilies he renders, the nature of his interventions – lexical variations, shifts in register, omissions, or elaborations – invite us to consider his work as a kind of embedded exegesis, where translation becomes a theological reading.

But before approaching Davit Tbeli's translations, it is important to outline what we know about his life and the context in which he worked.

In fact, almost nothing is known about him. In the Ordinance of the Church Council (Synod) of Ruisi-Urbnisi in 1104,² Davit is named together with another Georgian ecclesiastic figure, Stepane Sananoisdze: დირსთა მამათა ჩუქინთა დავით ტბელისა და სტეფანე სანანიანის საუკუნომცა არს გენებად და კურთხევად მათი³ (“The memory of our venerable fathers, Davit Tbeli and Stepane Sananoisdze, is everlasting, and their blessing endures”). Stepane's name, in turn, appears in the hymnographic collection of Mikael Modrekili, the *iadgari* compiled between 978 and 988, where several hymns of his composition are preserved.⁴ On the basis of these references, scholars have concluded that Davit Tbeli and Stepane lived and worked in the same period, namely, the second half of the 10th century.⁵

The earliest independent mention of Davit, apart from Stepane, occurs in a manuscript copied in 1030 (MS Tbilisi, Korneli Kekelidze Georgian National Centre of Manuscripts [hereafter: NCM], A-1), which preserves Euthymius the Hagiorite's Georgian translations of Gregory the Theologian's homilies. In the colophon to *Or. 24* (on St Cyprian), Davit is named as the translator: ეს საკითხავი წმიდისა კუპრიანე მღვდელმოწამისა დავით ტბელის ძის თარგმნილი არს. ვინცა იკითხვიდეთ, ლოცვა ყავთ მისთვეს (“This reading for [lit. of] St. Cyprian the Hieromartyr was translated by Davit son of Tbeli. Whoever [of you] reads it, pray for him!”).⁶ The analysis of Georgian manuscripts containing Euthymius' translations shows that Davit's contributions were incorporated into these collections gradually, thus documenting the ongoing process of his work. Most likely, *Or. 24* was the first piece of

² Text published in Gabidzashvili 1978: 176–196.

³ Gabidzashvili 1978: 196.

⁴ Zhordania 1892: 113.

⁵ Kekelidze 1980: 179–180.

⁶ MS Tbilisi, NCM, A-1, fol. 438r (see Fig. 2); Bregadze 1988: 68.

Gregory's writings that Davit translated.⁷ His project, begun in the 1020s, was completed in the 1040s; all in all, Davit translated ten homilies.⁸

Davit's choice of texts was far from random. Of Gregory's sixteen liturgical homilies, Davit translated *Or. 24*; a text that Euthymius had reworked for another purpose, namely, to create the praise of St Demetrios of Thessaloniki.⁹ He also retranslated *Or. 2*, whose earlier rendering by Euthymius diverged considerably from the Greek.¹⁰ While Euthymius translated three of the Theological Orations, Davit translated the remaining second Theological Oration (*Or. 28*), which Euthymius left untranslated for reasons unknown (the first theological homily, *Or. 27*, had been translated earlier by Grigol of Oshki).¹¹ This pattern strongly suggests that Davit selected his material in consultation with Euthymius' circle: his translations did not duplicate what had already been done, but rather complemented Euthymius' corpus. One might therefore suppose that Davit himself worked on Mount Athos. Yet neither in the *Life of John and Euthymius*¹² nor in any other source connected with Iviron Monastery does his name appear. It is thus more likely that Davit never resided on Athos at all.

After the death of Euthymius (who passed away in 1028, while Davit's first translation appears already in a manuscript copied in 1030–1031), Davit Tbeli took up the major task his predecessor had begun – the creation of a Georgian corpus of Gregory's writings.¹³ This is an important point: by the 1020s Davit must already have been a well-known and acknowledged translator, and it is plausible that he was chosen to carry on Euthymius' work precisely because his approach was closely aligned with that of Euthymius, sharing the same translational principles.

Euthymius the Hagiorite lived and worked at a decisive turning point, when the cultural and political orientation of the Georgians had taken a clear direction toward Byzantium. In this context, the concern expressed by his father, Ioane the Georgian, that “the land of Kartli was lacking in books”¹⁴ reflects the new demands that arose from this epochal shift and the fact that Georgian literature was poor in comparison with what Constantinople had by then achieved. It was precisely Euthymius' task to remedy this deficiency: to provide Georgian literature with new works hitherto untranslated, and to accomplish this within a short span of time. The sheer volume of material to be translated, together with the brevity of a single human life, was one of the factors that to some extent shaped Euthymius' method of translation.

Equally decisive, however, was the condition of Georgian society itself. Deprived of new books, it was, in the words of Ephrem Mtsire, “a simple and infant people”,¹⁵ neither mature enough nor prepared to grasp such texts in their full depth. With this in mind, Euthymius sought to make his translations as clear as possible: he simplified the originals, expanded or condensed them, added insertions and explanations, and in more than a few cases went well beyond paraphrasing to assume the role of author himself, producing compilations that amounted to new interpretations of the sources. Such is the case, for instance, with Gregory of Nazianzus'

⁷ Matchavariani 2003: 114.

⁸ Matchavariani 2005: 95–103.

⁹ Matchavariani 2004–2005: 165–176.

¹⁰ Matchavariani 1995: 201–225.

¹¹ Regarding the Georgian translations of Gregory's *Or. 27* see Raphava 2015: 294–332.

¹² For an English translation see Grdzelidze 2009: 53–96.

¹³ Matchavariani 2005: 95–103.

¹⁴ MS Iviron Monastery, georg. 10, 334v: რ(ომ)ელ յերշտ ნაკლულ զան օյտ ձ(უ)յ(ա)ն(ա)ւ յարտունեաւ վոցնոաց(ա)ն... (Gippert *et al.* 2022: 120; English translation by Grdzelidze 2009: 67).

¹⁵ MS Jerusalem, Greek Patriarchate, georg. 43, fol. 2v: მაშინ ჩუმნი ნათესავი ლიტონ օյտ და ჩჩლდ; see Bregadze 1988: 149.

second and third homilies. In short, Euthymius' translations are prime examples of the above mentioned method of “interpretive translation”.

Davit Tbeli, as Euthymius' younger contemporary, faced similar challenges. His translations, too, had to be fully accessible to readers and listeners alike. A close study of his renderings of the works of Gregory the Theologian reveals similar types of intervention: expansion, interpolation, abridgment, condensation, paraphrase. Like Euthymius, Davit produced translations that interpret the original. Yet unlike Euthymius, he remained consistently close to the Greek source. To see more clearly how Davit's interpretive approach takes shape, it is useful to examine the specific kinds of changes introduced into the texts he translated.

I. Expansion

1. In Davit's translations, the most common phenomenon is the expansion resulting from the differences between Georgian and Greek grammatical structures; for example, restoring omitted sentence elements, rendering Greek passive and participial constructions with active verbal forms, and similar adjustments.

2. In many cases, Davit renders a single Greek word by means of two or more Georgian equivalents. Such examples are also fairly common in Euthymius' translations, but in Davit's work they are especially abundant, appearing in virtually every sentence of his translations as well as in his interpolations:

a) synonyms

ῶν βραχὺ μὲν τὸ τῆς ζωῆς ταύτης λείψανον (Or. 8, § 5; PG 35, 793 C 16 – 796 A 1)
“whose remnant of this life is but brief”

ρωμέλταρα ὅμοιοις αριστεραῖς τοις αὐτοῖς παναρκιωμό καὶ εἰδότο (MS NCM A-87, fol. 364v)¹⁶
“those for whom the remaining portion and residue of this life is very small”

b) hendiadyses

Πέτρον ὕστερον, τὸ τῆς Ἐκκλησίας ἔρεισμα (Or. 9, § 1; PG 35, 820 B 2)
“Peter, later the pillar of the Church”

პეტრე, საფუძველსა და სიმბატის ეკლესიისა (MS NCM A-87, fol. 228v)
“Peter, the foundation and steadfast support of the Church”

c) compounds and derivatives

Sometimes, when translating compounds and derivatives, Davit divides the meaning of the word: with one equivalent he renders only the sense of the stem or one component of the compound, and with the other, the meaning of the affix or the remaining part of the compound.

τὸ τῆς ψυχῆς εὐγενὲς διαφθείρειν τῇ περὶ ταῦτα μικροπρεπείᾳ (Or. 24, § 3; PG 35, 1173 B 1–2)
“to corrupt the nobility of the soul through a petty-minded concern with such things”

სულისა სიკეთესა და აზნაურებასა და დიდებასა განხერუნიან უშუერებითა (MS NCM A-87, fol. 341r)
“they debase the soul's goodness, nobility, and honor by their depravity”

¹⁶ Since the Old Georgian texts cited here have not been published, all quotations are taken directly from the manuscripts as indicated.

3. In certain instances, the expansion in the translation arises from the translator's attempt to clarify this or that specific word, e.g. a Graecism. In the given example, the part enclosed in brackets is an interpolation by the translator, illustrated with examples, meant to explain his choice of a particular Greek word.

ετι δε καταγωγια πήξασθαι και ξενῶνας (Or. 4, § 111; PG 35, 648 C 7–8)
“and moreover, to establish inns and xenones for guests”

რაოთა იყუნებ საქალწულონი და ქსენონი, [ესე იგი არს გლახავთა და

ჭირვალულთა შესაწყნარებელი] (MS NCM A-292, fol. 192v)
“so that there may be houses for virgins and xenones [that is, dwellings for the reception
of the poor and the afflicted]”

4. Expansion may also occur as a reflection of the translator's attitude toward the text or as a means of intensifying its emotional register. For example, in *Or. 12*, where Gregory speaks of the Holy Spirit, Davit develops Gregory's thought by expressing, in the author's voice, his own devotion to the Spirit and his submission to Its will, since the Spirit is part of the Lord and represents Him:

გარნა კუალად სახიერებამან მანვე და სიყუარულმან სულისა წმიდისამან
მომიყვანა მე მრავალთა უმჯობესისათვს და შემომიყვანა შორის, ვითარცა-
იგი მას სათხო-უჩნდა და არა ვითარ-იგი მე მენება. და უმეტესადდა იგი არს
ჩემი ნებად, რომელი-იგი მას სონდეს, ამის უკუკ ჯერისათვს განგებულებით
მომიღება მე (MS St Petersburg, Russian Academy of Sciences, Institute of Oriental
Manuscripts [hereafter: IOM], P-3, fol. 263r).

“But again, it was that same goodness, that same love of the Holy Spirit which led me toward what is greater and set me in the midst, as it pleased Him, and not as I desired. And above all, it is my will only when it accords with His will; for on this occasion, He has guided me by His own providence (Or. 12, § 4; cf. PG 35, 848 A 13).

Davit also uses such insertions to enhance the vividness and expressiveness of individual passages. In the examples shown, you can see how he underscores, in one case, the repulsiveness of pagan sacrifice, and in another, the mercy of the Lord toward humankind.

II. Davit as a Commentator

Another method of translation is set apart here, for it reveals the translator's position in a particularly noteworthy way. Technically, these cases may also be regarded as expansions; however, in such instances, Davit brings into sharper focus certain themes or issues in Gregory's homilies which, in his judgment, required especially clear and emphatic exposition in order to prevent his Georgian readers or hearers from falling into error.

One example comes from *Or. 36*. Here Gregory states that the true believer must avoid all those who corrupt the Lord's true teachers and who preach a hierarchy within the Godhead. Such people, Gregory says, must be cut off from the faithful as incurable wounds of the Church – yet not out of hatred but out of pity for their delusion (*Or. 36, § 10; PG 36, 277 B 6 – C 3*). Davit, however, renders this passage in a markedly uncompromising way, stressing the destructive role of heretics in the Church:

ხოლო რომელი სხუებრ რასმე მეტყუელებდებ და სხუებრ ირწმუნებდებ
გარეგან მისსა, რომელი-იგი თქუენ გისწავიეს, მათ ევლტოდეთ, ვითარცა
ბრანგუსა მას განმრყენელსა და გესლსა ეკლესიისასა მათ ეოვლადენ

განიოტებდით. ნუცა ჰზრახავთ, ნუ მახლობელიად მათსა ყოვლადვე მიხუალთ, არამედ სრულიად განეშორენით მათგან, კითარცა წინააღმდეგომთაგან ჭეშმარიტებისათა (MS IOM P-3, fol. 270r).

“As for those who speak otherwise and believe otherwise concerning Him whom you were taught, flee from them as from the mind-corrupting beast and from the poison of the Church. Avoid them altogether; do not think of them, do not draw near to them in any way but withdraw entirely, as from those who oppose the truth.”

This is followed by a long insertion, in which Davit develops the theme still further, reinforcing his position with biblical citations:

რამეთუ იტყვს სული წმიდად დავით წინასწარმეტყუელისა და მეფისა მიერ: “არა მოძულენი შენი მოვიძულნეა და მტერთა შენთა ზედა განვჰკაფდიო, სიძულილითა სრულითა მოვიძულენო” (Ps. 138:21–22) და უფალი იტყვს კუალად: “რომელსა უკუარდეს მამად, გინა დედად ჩემსა უფროდს, იგი არა არს ჩემდა ღირსო” (Mt. 10:37) და შემდგომი. ესე იგი არს, თუ მამად, გინა დედად საღმრთოსა იყვნენ, განეყენე მათგანო, ვითარცა მტერთაგან. უკუეთუ მამისა და დედისაგან განყენებასა გუბრძანებს ამის ჯერისათვს, რაოდენ სხუათაგან ჯერ-არს სივლტოლად, რომელი უცხოსა და განმრყენელსა გონებითა განხერწილითა ზრახვიდენ მოძღვრებასა შეკყრობილნი და უმეტესად ჯერ-არს თქუმად, დაბნელებულნი ამპარტავნებისაგან და ცუდად მზუაობრობისა, რომელთათვს ამცნებს წმიდად მოციქული ჰრომაელთა და ეტყვს: “გლოცავ, ძმანო, განეყენენით ეგვითართა მათგანო” (Rom. 16:17). ხოლო განეყენენით ესრეთ, არამედ გეწყალოდენცა შეცომილნი იგი და განვრდომილნი ღმრთისაგან ნებსით თუსით (MS IOM P-3, fol. 270r).

“For the Holy Spirit says through David, the prophet and king: ‘Do not I hate them, that hate thee? and am not I grieved with those that rise up against thee? I hate them with perfect hatred’ (Ps. 138[139]:21–22).¹⁷ And the Lord likewise says: “He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me” (Mt. 10:37), and so on. This means that, if a father or mother should stand against the divine, you must withdraw from them as from enemies. If He commands us, for the sake of this matter, to separate even from father and mother, how much more fitting is flight from others – those who, being corrupt in mind, devise doctrines that are strange and misleading, ensnared – and, one should rather say, darkened – by pride and vain self-exaltation. Concerning such people the holy Apostle admonishes the Romans, saying: ‘I beseech you, brethren, withdraw from such as these’ (Rom. 16:17). Yet withdraw in such a way as to show compassion for those who have gone astray and become alienated from God through their own folly.”

A similar kind of interpretive intervention is found in *Or. 2* § 38, where Gregory begins to discuss the doctrine of the Trinity and explains its essence (PG 35, 445 B 12 – C 8). Here Davit does not translate Gregory’s exposition at all but instead inserts his own creed-like declaration: sentence by sentence he stresses the unbegottenness of the Father and the tri-hypostatic unity of God. What he provides is not so much an explanation of the Trinity as a series of assertive, dogmatic statements. The categorical tone of these affirmations leaves no room for hesitation or doubt, and effectively prevents the faithful from straying from the true path. Such interventions clearly responded to the needs of the time and to the intellectual capacities of the

¹⁷ All English biblical quotations are cited from the King James Version (KJV).

intended audience, which required the translator to offer additional clarification of theological dogmas.

ესრეთ უკუე ჯერ არს გულის-გმისყოფად და სარწმუნოებად წმიდისა მის სამებისად: მამად უშობელი, მშობელი ძისად და მისვე უშობელისა დაუსაბამოსა მამისაგან გამომავალი სული წმიდად. რამეთუ ვითარმცა დიდ იყო და თაყუანის საცემელ ყოველთა დაბადებულთა, ხილულთა და უხილავთაგან საიდუმლოდ იგი ყოვლად წმიდისა მის სამებისა ერთარსებისად, არა თუმცა დაუსაბამო იგი და უშობელი მამად იყო მიზეზ სახიერთა მათ, ძისად და სულისა წმიდისად, ერთოსად მის, ვითარცა ძისა და სიტყვისად, ხოლო მეორისად მის, ვითარცა სულისა დაუსრულებელისა და განულევნებელისად, ძე უკუე შობილი მამისაგან უშობელისა, უწინარეს ყოველთა საუკუნეთა, და სული წმიდად გამოსლვით დაუსაბამოსა მისგანვე და უშობელისა ღმრთისა და მამისა. აღვიარენ და ვქადაგნეთ ვმამადლად, რამეთუ კეთილ არს და ფრიად საჭირო, რათა ერთი დავიცვათ ზუებ ღმრთებად და ბუნებად სამთავრე, და სამნი აღვიარნეთ გუამოვნებანი და თითოეული თვთებითა მის თვისითა (MS NCM A-87, fol. 199v).

“This, then, is the proper understanding and the true faith concerning the Holy Trinity: the Father is unbegotten, the begetter of the Son; and the Holy Spirit proceeds from the same unbegotten and unoriginate Father. For the mystery of the all-holy Trinity and Its consubstantial unity is great and worthy of veneration by all created beings, both visible and invisible. Although the unoriginate and unbegotten Father is the cause of the two Persons – the Son and the Holy Spirit – of the one, as Son and Word, and of the other, as the Spirit which is unfailing and inexhaustible, nevertheless the Son is begotten from the unbegotten Father before all ages, and the Holy Spirit proceeds from that same unoriginate and unbegotten God and Father. We confess and proclaim this openly, for it is good and greatly necessary: that we may preserve the one Godhead and the single nature of the Three, while also confessing the Three Persons, each in His own proper and distinctive property.

III. Omission (Abridgement)

In addition to omitting individual words, Davit systematically leaves out passages of the original text in which:

- a) the argumentation is overly rhetorical and might have been less accessible to a Georgian audience,
- or
- b) the text contains reminiscences of the ancient world or references to specific heresies. In such cases Davit is remarkably consistent: he either omits the passage altogether or reduces it to the briefest possible summary.

This tendency is especially evident in his translation of Gregory's *Or. 4, Against Julian the Apostate*. The original contains a wealth of allusions to the classical world, which Davit either abridges or excises. Thus, in §§ 94–95 Gregory compares Julian to the mythological monsters Scylla and Charybdis, equating the emperor's actions with theirs. In place of these long paragraphs, Davit offers only a few sentences that summarize their essential point:

რამეთუ... განცხადებულად არა ბრძანებდა იგი დევნულებასა ქრისტიანეთასა. ხოლო რომელნი იპოვნიან უმძველეს ქრისტიანეთი ზედა, მათ ადიდებდა და პატივსცემდა მოსწრავებით. და რამეთუ შჯულთა არა

აღსწერდა, არამედ სატანჯველთა თითო-სახეთა და ციხად-ციხადთა იგონებდა მათთვის (MS NCM A-87, fol. 307v).

“For he did not openly proclaim persecution against the Christians; but when he found others more violent against them, he honored and commended such men eagerly. And although he did not record formal laws, he devised for their sake various kinds and degrees of torments.”

At the end of the same homily, in §§ 102–106, Gregory devotes five extended paragraphs to the question of Hellenic education. He reports that according to Julian, the art of rhetoric and Hellenic learning are inseparably linked with pagan religion, while ignorance must remain the lot of Christians, for all higher, divine wisdom is, for them, contained in a single word: “believe” (Πίστευσον, *Or. 4*; *PG* 35, 637 A 2–3). Gregory then turns to reflect on the relation between language and faith. The term ἐλληνίζειν here does not merely denote pagan or ancient culture; Gregory consciously frees it from a strictly religious connotation. He argues that language, like every art or useful institution, belongs not to its inventor alone but to all who make use of it (*PG* 35, 641 B 5–7). If rhetorical eloquence were the exclusive property of pagan Greeks, and Christians were forbidden to approach it, then by the same logic Romans should also be denied the use of writing (a Phoenician invention), military tactics (ascribed to the Euboeans), weaponry (to the Cyclopes), chess, and countless other arts whose origins lay outside their own people. Gregory thus concludes that Greek Christians – despite their faith – remain Greeks and the descendants of Greeks, and therefore the rightful heirs of Greek rhetoric and of Greek culture as a whole.

Gregory’s discussion, which stretches across §§102–106, is in fact the climax and most important section of *Or. 4*. Yet in Davit’s translation, this entire passage is reduced to only a few sentences:

ესე უბუე ცუდ და ამაო არს და ვერ შემძლებელ ხარ შენ ამას შეწირვად ეშმაკთა, რამეთუ არა ვხედავ, ვითარმცა ენავ და შჯული ელენთა შორის ზოგად მოპოვნებულ იყო და უკუეთუმცა შჯულისანი იყვნეს სწავლანი იგი, ნუუკუე და სამართლითმცა დავეყენენით მათისა სწავლისაგან, რამეთუ ჭეშმარიტებით შჯულისა შენისა საქმენი განსაყენებელცა არიან კაცთა მიერ და საძაგელ ფრიად, რამეთუ საქებელნი შჯულისა შენისა ქადაგებანი და მოძღვართა შენთანი არიან მამათმავლობანი და სიძვანი და ყოველნივე ხრწილებანი (MS NCM S-383, fol. 180v).

“This is vain and futile, and you cannot offer it as a sacrifice to demons. For I do not see that language and religion were found exclusively among the Greeks. Even if their religion contained learning, we ought not therefore to be bound to their teaching; for in truth the works of their religion are abominable before men, and most shameful. For the things they proclaim as praiseworthy in their religion, and the teachings of their instructors, are sodomy, fornication, and every form of corruption” (*Or. 4*, §103).

As we can see, Davit renders the above passage of the homily in a highly simplified form, effectively summarizing Gregory’s lengthy discussion into a concise conclusion: pagan belief is unacceptable and reprehensible, but language and learning are not inherently tied to religion.

Another feature that stands out in Davit’s translations of Gregory’s works is the use of hagiographic *topoi*.

One of the central functions of hagiographic literature in Byzantium was its didactic purpose: the instruction of the faithful and the presentation of exemplary models of Christian conduct. The *Vitae* and *Passiones* of saints offered readers or listeners patterns of behavior to be

imitated. For this reason, hagiography was conceived from the outset not merely as a record of historical facts but as a spiritual and moral guide.¹⁸

This didactic aim was served by hagiographic *topoi* – recurring narrative schemes and clichés that transformed the saint’s life into a shared “rhetorical language”. Examples include the martyr’s unshakable endurance under torture, the ascetic’s withdrawal into the desert, miraculous healings, or angelic visitations. Such *topoi* ensured both the recognizability of the text and its didactic value. As Martin Hinterberger observes, the repetitiveness of hagiographic texts should not be dismissed as mere formula, but rather understood as a deliberate strategy aimed at foregrounding Christian virtue and at “teaching” the reader or listener.¹⁹

The use of *topoi* was not confined to *Vitae* and *Passiones* alone. They permeated homiletics, where sermons invoked saintly examples to illustrate truth; liturgical hymnography, where short formulas symbolically expressed the saint’s virtues; and other spheres. Thus, hagiographic *topoi* became a universal didactic and spiritual instrument across multiple Byzantine literary genres, presenting not only the saint’s sanctity but also a clear model of how the faithful should live.

It must be noted that both the didactic impulse and the use of *topoi* are already visible in Gregory’s works; for example, in his depiction of the Maccabean martyrs (*Or. 15*), in the praise of his sister Gorgonia (*Or. 8*), in his encomium of the priest-martyr Cyprian (*Or. 24*), and even in his invective against Julian (*Or. 4*), which is interesting from many points of view.

Emperor Flavius Claudius Julian²⁰ ruled the Byzantine Empire for only two years (361–363), but this short period was sufficient for him to leave his mark on Byzantine history as a gifted and progressive ruler, attentive to the interests of the state.

For Christians, however, Julian’s brief reign was remembered as one of the most difficult times. The reason lay in his reforms – above all, in his well-known edict against the Christians,²¹ which forbade them access to pagan education.²² In itself, this decision was entirely logical: those who reject paganism, and with it the entire pagan cultural tradition, should not be entrusted with the teaching of youth in matters they themselves do not believe.

This edict provoked considerable unrest and became one of the principal reasons for Gregory’s invective against Julian. In Gregory’s account, every action of the emperor is to be condemned; to him are ascribed all types of sins and vile crimes. In fact, this portrayal closely resembles the hagiographic *topos* of the wicked persecutor. Yet, despite such a relentlessly negative characterization, the attentive reader will notice that Gregory’s depiction of Julian is not entirely consistent in its negative characterization. Whether consciously or not, Gregory’s polemical homily contains details of the emperor’s activity that could be judged positively; in several instances Gregory even appears, in a way, to justify some of Julian’s actions. This is true, for example, of chapter 75 of *Or. 4*, where Gregory lists Julian’s reforms: the reduction of state taxes, the improvement of communications, and the severe punishment of theft (*PG* 35, 600 B 13 – C 5). These measures were unquestionably beneficial to the state. Gregory attempts to nullify their value with the remark that “the health of one or two limbs does not mean the health of the whole body” (*PG* 35, 600 C 12 – 601 A 2). Yet this observation, instead of cancelling the reforms, actually underscores the impression that they were, in fact, advantageous for the empire.

¹⁸ Delehaye 1907: 62–68; 1962: 50–54.

¹⁹ Hinterberger 2014: 161–181.

²⁰ OCD 1996: 800.

²¹ Athanassiadi-Fowden 1981: 176–184; Bowersock 1978: 83–88.

²² Julian 1913: *Letter 36*, 117–123.

Similarly, in chapter 111 of the same *Oratio* Gregory notes that Julian transplanted certain institutions associated with Christianity (such as hostels, houses for the poor, and the like) into a pagan environment (*PG* 35, 648 C 7–13). Although in chapter 112 Gregory goes on to provide a lengthy explanation of what he sees as the “true” meaning of Julian’s initiatives (*PG* 35, 648 D 2 – 649 A 9), this does not erase the fundamentally positive character of the measures themselves.

In this sense, one might even say that Gregory’s portrayal of Julian is, at points, ambivalent: lacking complete coherence and not being entirely or consistently negative. This may be explained by two factors. First, Gregory was a contemporary of Julian and knew him personally. Second, Gregory’s period coincided with the early stages of the development of Christian hagiography, at a time when the stereotypical narrative patterns had not yet become fully fixed or obligatory. Gregory was, in effect, describing a living person whom he knew well, and under such circumstances it would have been difficult to reject all positive qualities outright, especially since doing so was not yet demanded by a firmly codified literary scheme.

From this perspective, Davit Tbeli’s translation is of particular interest. In Davit’s rendering, Julian’s figure is presented in a strictly negative light, fully conforming to the codified image of the tyrant-emperor that dominates contemporary hagiographic literature. This is only natural: Davit was writing almost six centuries after Julian’s reign. Unlike Gregory, he had no personal or emotional connection to the emperor. For Davit, Julian is simply a destructive figure, equal to Diocletian and other persecutors of Christianity. Moreover, by Davit’s time, the literary conventions of hagiography had become firmly defined. Accordingly, he reworked Gregory’s homily in strict accordance with these established patterns. What follows examines how this transformation takes place.

In hagiographic literature, the heretical emperor or the wicked judge is set in stark opposition to the martyr and is typically constructed as his complete antithesis: evil, demonic, destructive and malign in every action, with no possibility that any good could proceed from his hand. In short, he is the embodiment of Satan. Davit applies this very scheme to his characterization of Julian, and accordingly omits entirely all those passages in his translation of Gregory’s homily which might, even to the slightest degree, cast the emperor in a favorable light.

Thus, for example, Davit does not include the passages describing Julian’s reforms. As already noted, in chapter 111 of *Or. 4* Gregory briefly recounts Julian’s attempts to graft onto pagan soil certain institutions borrowed from Christianity, which, however reluctantly, invite approval: Julian imposed penances upon sinners, introduced special prayers, required training before priestly ordination, and founded schools, hospices for the poor, hostels, and the like (*PG* 35, 648 B 11 – C 7). Indeed, Gregory uses all this primarily as material for rhetorical antithesis and ultimately dismisses the significance of these initiatives by listing the revolts and other calamities that occurred during Julian’s reign. But for Davit, even in this context, any positive action traceable to Julian is unacceptable, especially when it derives from Christian liturgical practice. Accordingly, these passages are omitted from his translation, and only a brief mention remains. After this, Davit offers a summation of Julian’s activities which has no parallel in Gregory’s text:

და რავდენი რა არს ჩუენისა წესიერებისა საქმე, ესე ყოველი ზაკვთ განაწეა
მას და რეცა აჩუენებდა სათხოებათა სიმდიდოებისა და კაცომოუარებისათვს
ზრუნვასა (MS NCM S-383, fol. 182v).

“And as many of our ecclesiastical institutions as there were, all these he deceitfully established; and as it were, he displayed a wealth of virtues and concern for works of charity” (*Or. 4*, §111).

Even more striking is Davit’s treatment of Gregory’s *Or. 36*, where he again intervenes actively and reshapes a text that, at first glance, seems far removed from the hagiographic genre. This homily is apologetic in character: Gregory defends himself before bishops and members of the congregation who believed that he had “usurped” the see of Constantinople. Here Gregory speaks of himself as an ordinary man, marked by weaknesses and failings; these passages contain the intimate, confessional tone so characteristic of his poetry. In Davit’s translation, such sections are either omitted altogether or substantially reworked. The reason is clear: the person of a great Christian theologian must be presented to the reader or listener as the ideal figure of a holy father. Any hint of doubt, weakness, or frailty in the historical person could mislead the audience. Davit therefore strips Gregory’s figure of every detail that might lend itself to misinterpretation, and instead constructs the sufficiently schematic image of an ideal pastor – an image that is unmistakably shaped by the conventions of hagiographic literature.

Summary

As we have seen, Davit displays a marked tendency toward literary schematization. This is evident not only in his characterization of figures within the works he translates but also in other features of his translations, which cannot be examined in detail here. Naturally, this inclination toward schematization simplifies and impoverishes Davit’s renderings to some extent, since the subtle nuances of the original are lost. Yet this feature must also be recognized as a characteristic element of his translation method. Davit’s translations are reader-oriented: like Euthymius the Hagiorite, he strives to bring the original closer to the reader (rather than bringing the reader closer to the original – a goal more typical of later, literal translations, especially those of the Hellenophile school). His aim is to make the text as accessible as possible, removing any passages that might prove puzzling or misleading to an inexperienced audience. The reworking of Gregory’s homilies according to hagiographic clichés serves precisely this purpose: the stereotyped figures shaped by hagiographic conventions were familiar and intelligible to readers, whereas preserving their original individuality, in Davit’s view, might give rise to misunderstanding.

Thus, the features of Davit’s translations discussed above highlight the closeness of his method to the translational conception of Euthymius the Athonite. As noted, both translators share the same aim: to adapt the original to the reader, to simplify complex texts, and to render them comprehensible to the contemporary Georgian audience. But a shared aim does not necessarily imply identical methods. Euthymius reoriented the original entirely toward the reader, occasionally modifying the Greek text to such an extent that the result can be regarded as a new work. His conflation of Gregory’s *Or. 2* and *3*, together with a radical shift in their rhetorical purpose, produced two compositions that differ substantially from the original homilies. Other comparable examples of this practice have also been documented.

Davit’s reconfiguration of the denunciation of Julian according to hagiographic conventions may be seen as a parallel to Euthymius’ translation of Gregory’s funeral speech for Basil (*Or. 43*). Both Davit and Euthymius pursued the same aim: to recast homiletic works into hagiographic compositions. Yet they implemented this aim in different ways. In Davit’s version of the invective against Julian, as we have seen, the changes are confined to individual sentences or short passages; these alterations are moderate, and the translation remains close to the original. By contrast, Euthymius’ version of the funeral speech departs much further from Gregory’s text: lengthy rhetorical sections and mythological allusions are omitted, while extended miracle stories are inserted. As a result, Euthymius’ version diverges radically from the Greek original.²³ In short, his modifications are far more substantial and wide-ranging than Davit’s.

²³ Kurtsikidze 1995: 62.

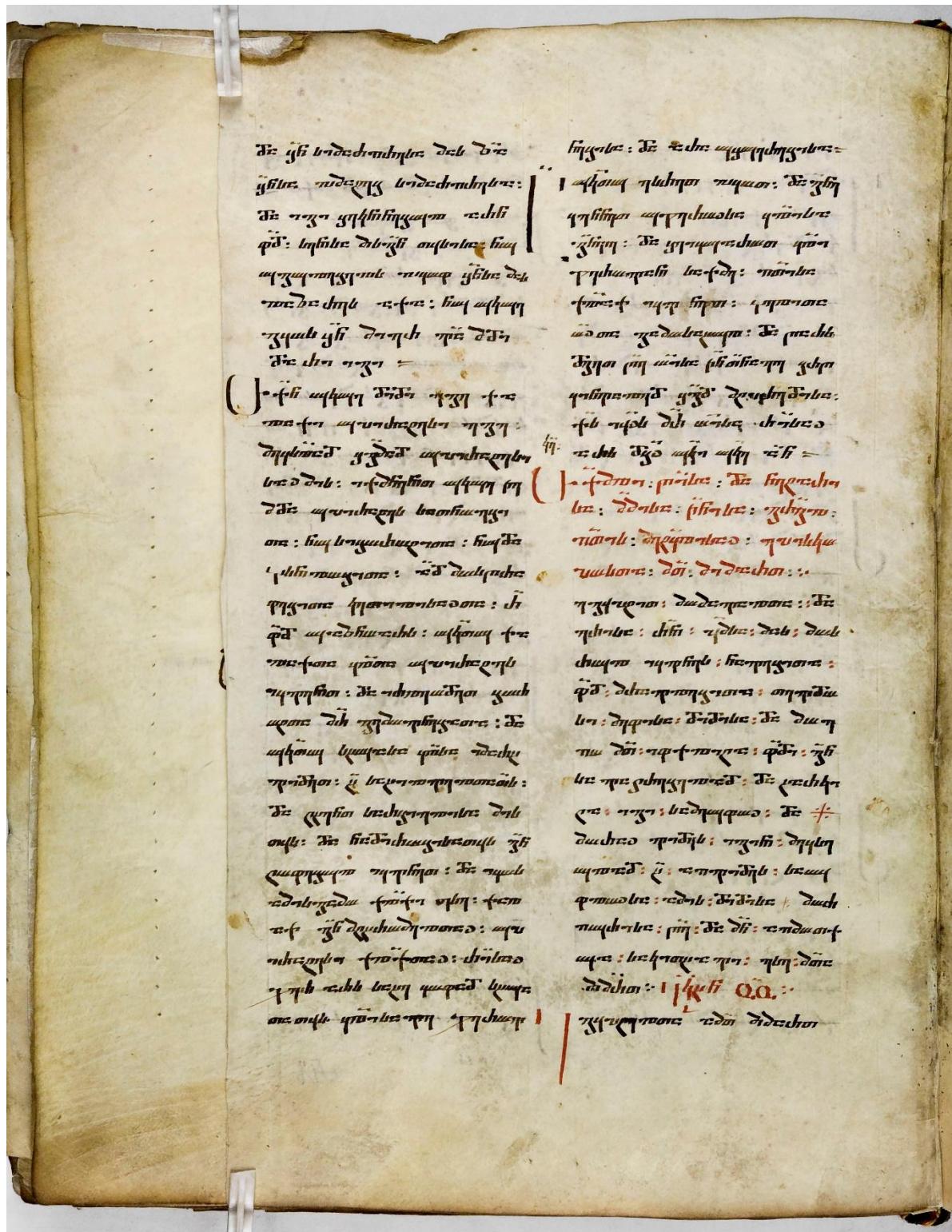


Fig. 1: MS Tbilisi, NCM, A-1 (11th c.), fol. 277v: collection of Georgian translations of the works of Gregory the Theologian, *Or. 34*, translation of Davit Tbeli

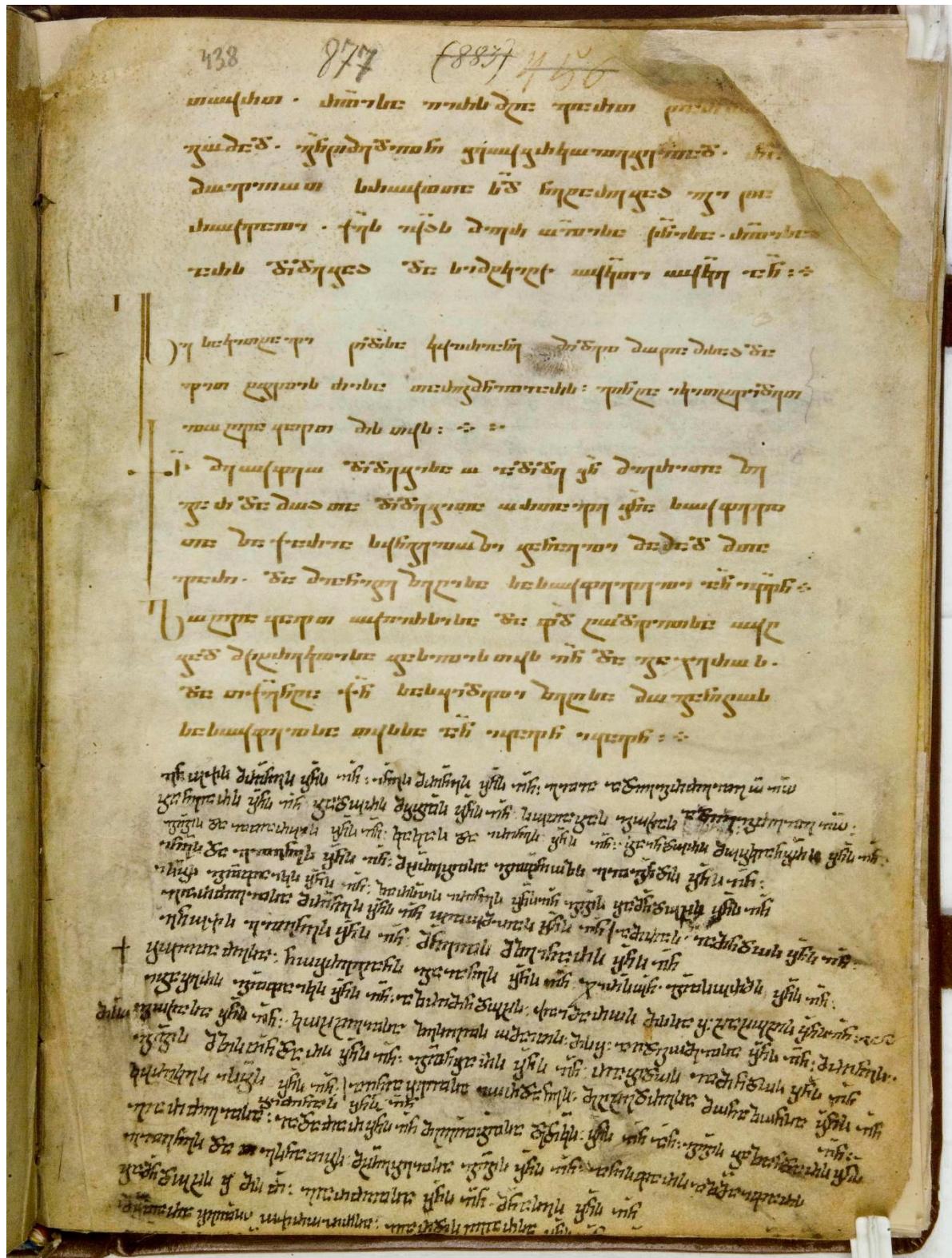


Fig. 2: MS Tbilisi, NCM, A-1 (1030 CE), fol. 438r: collection of Georgian translations of the works of Gregory the Theologian, end of *Or. 24*. Colophon inserted by the scribe himself at the end of the homily, indicating that the text is a translation by Davit. Below, a second colophon written in a different hand, dating from a later period.

Davit, being a contemporary of Euthymius, naturally faced similar challenges. His translations of Gregory's works reveal that, like Euthymius, he modified the text, adding expansions, interpolations, omissions, or paraphrases. Yet in no case are Davit's alterations as extensive as those of Euthymius. For Davit, the author's rights remain paramount: in none of his translations does he transform the original such that the work ceases to resemble its source or becomes a new composition loosely based on it. It is therefore misguided to expect in Davit – or in any other translator of the same period – the creative freedom and boldness characteristic of Euthymius. Euthymius was an exceptional figure, above all a great original writer, whose genius enabled him to recast translated texts into entirely new works – an extraordinary phenomenon in Georgian literature. His method was unique, as was his talent. Davit, by contrast, shares only the general aim with Euthymius: to render the Greek texts accessible. He therefore alters his originals, but always with moderation.

At the same time, Davit's translations of Gregory's works show that, despite this relative freedom in handling the text, he is remarkably consistent in one crucial respect: the rendering of theological terminology. It is precisely this consistency that distinguishes him from Euthymius and makes him the direct precursor of Ephrem Mtsire in the development of Georgian theological vocabulary. Davit's translations of Gregory can thus be regarded as representing an important stage in the evolution of Georgian theological and philosophical terminology. His practice also aligns him with Ephrem in his handling of biblical citations.

In conclusion, Davit Tbeli stands as a continuator of the tradition of the early Georgian translators and the Athonite school. Yet his translations generally remain closer to the Greek originals (especially in their treatment of terminology) than do those of Euthymius. In this respect Davit anticipates the approach of later translators such as Ephrem, and his work may thus be understood as a transitional stage between the Athonite and Hellenophile schools of translation.

Picture credits

Figs 1–2: Korneli Kekelidze Georgian National Centre of Manuscripts, Tbilisi



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გრიგოლ ნაზიაზელის თხზულებათა ინტერპრეტაცია:

დავით ტბელის თარგმანები

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შეა საუკუნეების ინტელექტუალურ სივრცეში თარგმნა ხშირ შემთხვევაში განიხილებოდა როგორც ეგზეგეტიკური პროცესი – ტექსტის ინტერპრეტაცია და მისი გადმოცემა სხვა ენაზე ისეთი ფორმით, რომელიც ახალი ენობრივი და კულტურული კონტექსტის შესაფერისი იქნებოდა. თარგმანის როგორც ინტერპრეტაციის ან კომენტირების გაგება განსაკუთრებით თვალსაჩინო იყო საღვთისმეტყველო თუ ფილოსოფიური ლიტერატურის გადმოდებისას, როდესაც მთარგმნელთა ამოცანა იყო არა მხოლოდ სიტყვების, არამედ მნიშვნელობების, თეოლოგიური ნიუანსებისა და ზნეობრივი გზავნილების გადმოტანა.

მსგავსი მიდგომა კარგად ჩანს ძველ ქართულ ნათარგმნ ლიტერატურაშიც. ინტერპრეტაციული თარგმანის თვალსაჩინო მაგალითად გვევლინება გრიგოლ დვითისმეტყველის თხზულებების XI საუკუნის მოღვაწის, დავით ტბელის მიერ შესრულებული თარგმანები. მართალია, დავითი ქართულ ტექსტებს კომენტარებს არ ურთავს, მაგრამ მის თარგმანებში შეტანილი ცვლილებები – მატება, კლება, პარაფრაზი და სხვა – ასახავს გადმოსადები ორიგინალის მთარგმნელისეულ გაგებას. ასეთ ვითარებაში თავად მთარგმნელი წარმოგვიდგება როგორც ტექსტის კომენტატორი, თარგმანი კი – როგორც ორიგინალის განსხვავებული ინტერპრეტაცია.

დავით ტბელის შესახებ თითქმის არაფერია ცნობილი. მისი თარგმანების შემცველი ხელნაწერების ანდერძ-მინაწერების მიხედვით, დავით ტბელი მოღვაწეობდა XI საუკუნის პირველ ნახევარში. ეს ხელნაწერები ძირითადად გრიგოლ ნაზიანზელის თხზულებათა ეფთვიმე მთაწმინდელის თარგმანების შემცველი კრებულებია, სადაც დავითის თარგმანების გაჩნდა თანდათანობით, რაც მთარგმნელის მუშაობის პროცესზე უნდა მიანიშნებდეს. საერთო ჯამში დავითმა თარგმნა გრიგოლ დვითისმეტყველის 10 პომილია. არსებული მასალის კვლევამ აჩვენა, რომ: 1) დავითმა გრიგოლის თხზულებების თარგმნა დაიწყო XI საუკუნის 20-იანი წლების ბოლოს, სავარაუდოდ, ეფთვიმე მთაწმინდელის გარდაცვალების შემდეგ მალევე, და დაასრულა 40-იანი წლების ბოლოს; 2) დავითი იყო საგანგებოდ შერჩეული მთარგმნელი, ვისაც დაუვალა ეფთვიმეს მიერ დაწყებული დიდი საქმის – გრიგოლ დვითისმეტყველის თხზულებათა ქართული კორპუსის – შექმნა. შესაძლოა, ეს გადაწყვეტილება განაპირობა იმ გარემოებამ,

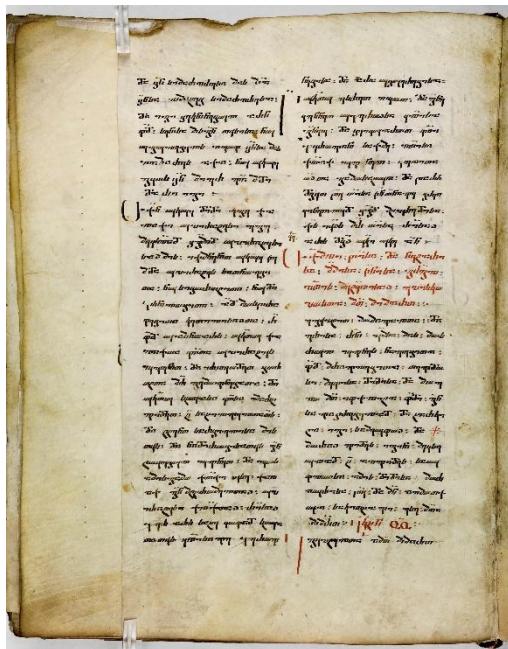
რომ დაგითი თავისი მუშაობის სტილითაც ახლოს იდგა ეფთვიმესთან, იზიარებდა მის მთარგმნელობით პრინციპებს.

ეფთვიმე მთაწმინდელისა და მისი უმცროსი თანამედროვის, დავით ტბელის მთავარი მიზანი იყო ორიგინალის დაახლოვება მკითხველთან, როგორი თხზულების თარგმანის გამარტივება, მისადაგება თანადროული ქართველი მკითხველის ცნობიერებისათვის ისე, რომ ახალი თარგმანები მაქსიმალურად გასაგები ყოფილიყო მკითხველისა თუ მსმენელისათვის. გრიგოლ ღვთისმეტყველის თხზულებათა დავითისეული თარგმანების კვლევამ აჩვენა, რომ დავითიც, ეფთვიმეს მსგავსად, ორიგინალს თარგმანში ცვლის – ავრცობს, ურთავს ჩანართებს, აკლებს და კუმშავს, აკეთებს პერეფრაზს. დავითი თავის ჩანართებში განმარტავს ორიგინალის გარკვეულ მონაკვეთებს, ან აკომენტირებს მათ; მთლიანად გამოტოვებს ორიგინალის იმ პასაჟებს, რომლებიც შეიცავს რემინისცენციას ანტიკურ სამყაროსთან ან სადაც მოხსენიებულია რომელიმე ერესი. ასეთ შემთხვევებში დავითი ძალიან თანამიმდევრულია – ყველა ამ მონაკვეთს ან მთლიანად გამოტოვებს, ან მაქსიმალურად ამოკლებს. დავითი გარდაქმნის სათარგმნ ტექსტს პაგიოგრაფიული ტოპოსების გამოყენებით. ამ მეთოდით თავის თაგმანებში დავითი აძლიერებს დიდაქტიკურ მოტივს – პაგიოგრაფიული ტოპოსები ბიზანტიური ლიტერატურის მრავალ ჟანრში გამოიყენებოდა უნივერსალურ სასწავლო და სულიერ ინსტრუმენტად, რომელიც არა მხოლოდ წმინდანის ლირსებას წარმოაჩენდა, არამედ მორწმუნესაც აძლევდა მკაფიო გზას, რომლის მიხედვითაც მას უნდა ეცხოვოს.

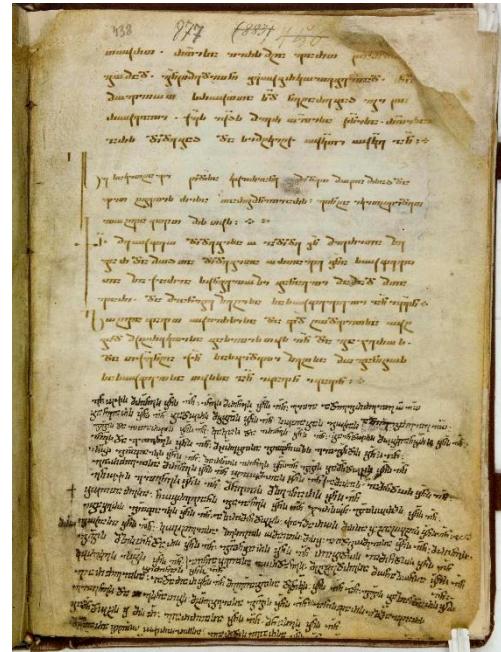
დავით ტბელის თარგმანების თავისებურებები ცხადყოფს დავითის მთარგმნელობითი მეთოდის სიახლოეს ეფთვიმე მთაწმინდელის მთარგმნელობით კონცეფციასთან. მაგრამ ერთი და იგივე მიზანი არ გულისხმობს მუშაობის მეთოდის იგივეობასაც. ეფთვიმე ორიგინალს მთლიანად უქვემდებარებს მკითხველის ინტერესებს და დედანს ზოგჯერ თარგმანში იმდენად ცვლის, რომ ვიღებთ თვისობრივად ახალ თხზულებას. დავითს ეფთვიმესთან აკავშირებს ზოგადი მიზანდასახულება – ორიგინალების მაქსიმალურად გასაგები ფორმით გადმოტანა თარგმანში. ამიტომ დავითიც ცვლის ტექსტს, მაგრამ მისი ცვლილებები ყოველთვის ზომიერია, თარგმანი გრიგოლის ტექსტს დიდად დაშორებული არ არის, ძირითადად ორიგინალს მისდევს.

ამასთანავე, დავითი თანამიმდევრულია ისეთ მნიშვნელოვან საკითხში, როგორიცაა საღვთისმეტყველო ტერმინოლოგიის გადმოტანა. სწორედ ამ თანამიმდევრულობის პრინციპით დავითი სცილდება ეფთვიმეს და გვესახება ეფრემ მცირის უშუალო წინამორბედად ქართული საღვთისმეტყველო ტერმინოლოგიის ჩამოყალიბების პროცესში. გრიგოლ ნაზიანზელის თხულებების დავითისეული თარგმანები კი უნდა მივიჩნიოთ ქართული

საღვთისმეტყველო-ფილოსოფიური ტერმინოლოგიის განვითარების ერთ საინტერესო ეტაპად. დავითი ასევე ამჟღავნებს სიახლოვეს ეფრემთან ბიბლიური ციტატების გადმოღებაში.



სურ. 1: ხეც, S-383, ფ. 277v



სურ. 2: ხეც, A-1, ფ. 438r

საბოლოოდ შეიძლება ითქვას, რომ დავით ტბელი თავისი მთარგმნელობითი მეთოდის მიხედვით ქველ ქართველ მთარგმნელთა და ეფთვიმე მთაწმინდელის მემკვიდრეა. მაგრამ დავითის თარგმანები ჩვეულებრივ უფრო ახლოსაა ბერძნულ დედამიწაზე. ორიგინალთან ამგვარი დამოკიდებულებით დავითი სცილდება ეფთვიმეს და უფრო გვიანდელი ხანის მთარგმნელებს (მაგალითად, ეფრემ მცირეს) უახლოვდება, ამდენად, დავითის მოღვაწეობა გვევლინება როგორც გარდამავალი საფეხური ათონურ და ელინოფილურ სკოლებს შორის.