

The Influence of Basilius Minimus' Commentaries on the Georgian Translations of Gregory the Theologian's Sermons

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.62235/dk.4.2025.10520>
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Abstract: The article examines how the *Commentaries* of the 10th-century Byzantine scholar Basilius Minimus on the sermons of Gregory the Theologian influenced the medieval Georgian translations of Gregory's sermons produced in the 10th–11th centuries. A comparative analysis of the Georgian translations and Basilius Minimus' *Commentaries* demonstrates that, although the famous Georgian translator Euthymios the Hagiorite did not translate Basilius' work, he was familiar with it and drew upon it when rendering Gregory's sermons into Georgian. Euthymios' use of the *Commentaries* served the purpose of making Gregory's complex theological and stylistically sophisticated passages more understandable and accessible to Georgian readers with limited experience. Gregory's texts contain intricate artistic devices – allegories, euphemisms, analogies, metaphors, etc., the meanings of which are clarified in Basilius' *Commentaries*. In Euthymios' translations, these artistic features are not reproduced literally but conveyed semantically, in accordance with Basilius' explanations. Ephrem Mtsire, the Hellenophile translator of Basilius Minimus' *Commentaries*, attached particular importance to reproducing Gregory the Theologian's literary style in his Georgian translations. He characterized Gregory's style as "laconic, deep and shrouded". In preserving these stylistic qualities, Ephrem relied extensively on those sections of Basilius' *Commentaries* that explicitly discuss the nature of Gregory's style. As a result, in Ephrem's highly literal translations, the nuances of tone and rhythm characteristic of Gregory are rendered with remarkable precision, thanks to the guidance provided by Basilius Minimus.

Keywords: Basilius Minimus' Commentaries, Gregory the Theologian, Georgian manuscripts, Georgian translations, Euthymios the Hagiorite, Ephrem Mtsire.

Of the medieval commentaries on the works of the Church Fathers, though not very numerous, almost all were translated into Georgian during the 11th–12th centuries. These include:

- John of Sinai's *Ladder* and its scholia, translated from Greek into Georgian twice: first by Euthymios the Hagiorite, abbot of the Iviron Monastery, in the last quarter of the 10th century, and later, in the 12th century, by the Hellenophile translator Petre Gelateli of the Gelati literary school (a monastic centre in western Georgia)¹
- the *Corpus Dionysiaca* and its commentaries composed by John of Scytopolis, translated from Greek into Georgian by Ephrem Mtsire of the Black Mountain by the end of the 11th century²
- Maximus the Confessor's works and their commentaries, rendered from Greek into Georgian in the 12th century by a Hellenophile translator of the Gelati literary school.³

¹ For the edition see Tsintsadze (2024). Altogether, six Georgian versions of *The Ladder* are known ranging in date from the 10th to the 19th century; scholia are found only in the two translations mentioned above. See Otkhmezuri (2025), 115–135.

² Alexidze (2009), 113–131. For a general overview of this subject see Otkhmezuri (2024), 568–569.

³ The *Commentaries* are attested in the margins of MS Kutaisi, State Historical Museum, 14 (13th c.).

A special place in the Georgian literary tradition is held by the translations of commentaries on the works of the Cappadocian Father, Gregory the Theologian. Among the numerous commentaries on Gregory's works, the following were translated into Georgian:

- Pseudo-Nonnos' *Mythological Commentaries* (6th c.), rendered into Georgian twice within a single century: first by Euthymios the Hagiorite in the early 11th century and later by Ephrem Mtsire at the end of the 11th century⁴
- the *Commentary on Gregory's Oratio 38*, a composite text incorporating excerpts from Maximus Confessor's *Ambigua ad Ioannem* along with traces of *Commentaries* by Basilus Minimus translated by Euthymios the Hagiorite⁵
- Basilus Minimus' *Commentaries* on Gregory the Theologian's sixteen liturgical sermons (10th c.), translated from Greek by Ephrem Mtsire.⁶

Several short excerpts of the *Commentaries*, whose Greek originals have not been identified – each comprising about one or two manuscript pages –, are appended to the translations of Gregory's sermons (*Or. 44, 9, 27*)⁷ in Georgian manuscripts.

All these translations are closely connected to the rendering into Georgian of Gregory the Theologian's works and are included in the Georgian *corpora* of Gregory's works. Briefly about the translation process of Gregory the Theologian's works: in the pre-Athonite period, two sermons – 38 and 39 – were translated by anonymous translators and incorporated into the Georgian homiletic and hagiographic collection (*mravaltavi*). During the same period two sermons (7, 27) were also translated from Armenian into Georgian by the Georgian translator from Tao-Klarjeti, Grigol Oshkeli. At the turn of the 10th–11th centuries, Euthymios the Hagiorite produced translations of several liturgical and non-liturgical sermons employing what Ephrem Mtsire described as the method of “reduction and expansion”, i.e. a free, reader-oriented, expositional translation technique. Shortly after Euthymios, the Tao-Klarjeti translator David Tbeli also rendered several sermons into Georgian.⁸ Finally, the translation of Gregory's works into Georgian was completed by Ephrem Mtsire at the end of the 11th century.

The aim of our present paper is to provide a brief overview of the Georgian version of Basilus Minimus' *Commentaries*, with a particular focus on their influence on the Georgian translations of Gregory the Theologian's sermons.

As already mentioned, Basilus Minimus' *Commentaries* on Gregory the Theologian's sixteen liturgical sermons were translated into Georgian by Ephrem Mtsire, founder of the Hellenophile tendency in Georgian translation practice, in the late 11th century – perhaps alongside the translation of Gregory the Theologian's works. The Georgian version of Basilus' *Commentaries* is preserved in four 12th–13th-century manuscripts of Gregory's *Corpus* of sixteen liturgical sermons: MSS Jerusalem, Greek Patriarchate, Georgian (hereafter: Jer. georg.) 43 (12th c.), Jer. georg. 15 (12th–13th cc.), Jer. georg. 13 (12th–13th cc.), and Tbilisi, Korneli Kekelidze Georgian National Centre of Manuscripts (hereafter: NCM), A-109

⁴ Otkhmezuri (2002).

⁵ Otkhmezuri (2016b).

⁶ The Georgian translation of Basilus Minimus' *Commentaries* has been published in Georgia only in part, encompassing *Commentaries* on just two of Gregory the Theologian's sermons (1 and 39); see Otkhmezuri (2011), 229–268.

⁷ Raphava (2020), 127–151.

⁸ See Maia Matchavariani, this volume.

(13th c.).⁹ In one case (Jer. georg. 13), it appears following the sermons, and in three cases (Jer. georg. 43, Jer. georg. 15, NCM A-109), it is preserved in the margins of the manuscripts (see Figs 1 and 2). The order of the sermons in the *Corpus* is as follows: *Orationes* and *Commentaries* 19, 38, 43, 39, 40, 11, 21, 42, 14, 16, 1, 45, 44, 41, 15, 24; in certain cases, the manuscripts lack some sermons at their beginning or end. It cannot be entirely ruled out that Ephrem translated the whole of Basilius Minimus' *Commentaries* on Gregory's forty-two sermons, since traces of these *Commentaries*, including several explanations on *Or. 7*, are attested in the Georgian *Corpus* of Gregory's sermons of the later period.¹⁰

Ephrem's translation of this work combines literal and free methods of translation, in contrast to the consistently Hellenophile style of his translation of Gregory the Theologian's sixteen liturgical sermons. A comparison between the Georgian translation and the Greek text¹¹ reveals that Ephrem's choice of translation method varies according to the content of the individual explanations. Thomas Schmidt, editor of the *Commentary* of Basilius on Gregory's *Oratio 38*, has grouped the explanations as follows:

- (a) explanations of various lexical units and Gregory's allusive phrases
- (b) explanations on the syntactical structure of Gregory's texts
- (c) explanations of Gregory's theological thoughts (Basilius Minimus used earlier theological commentaries to Gregory's writings)
- (d) explanations of the style and rhetorical art of Gregory (in these explanations Basilius mostly used Classical manuals of rhetoric namely, the writings of Hermogenes)¹²
- (e) explanations of punctuation.¹³

Basilius' explanations of theological character are translated by Ephrem with close fidelity, while his notes on Gregory's lexis, syntactical structure and allusive phrases, as well as rhetorical observations (because of the abundance of this kind of explanations, Basilius' *Commentaries* have been termed "rhetorical" in scholarly literature) are treated more freely, often with expansion or reduction. Basilius' discussion of Nicanor's eight-sign punctuation system, which he attempts to apply to Gregory's sermons, is also rendered freely, at times diverging substantially from the Greek or omitted altogether. The composition of each *Commentary* is reshaped: some explanations are merged or divided, others omitted, and a few appear to have been composed and added to Basilius' explanations by Ephrem himself.¹⁴

⁹ Bregadze (1988), 133–138, 144–158, 159–167.

¹⁰ Othkmezuri (2011), 174–178.

¹¹ As only one Greek text of the *Commentaries* on Gregory's liturgical sermons (*Oratio 38*) has been published (Schmidt 2001), the Georgian version of the *Commentaries* was compared with this edition of *Comm. 38*, as well as with MS Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France (hereafter: BnF), Coislin 240 (11th c.). On Basilius Minimus' *Commentaries* of Gregory the Theologian's non-liturgical sermons see Rioual (2019), Rioual (2020); see also Rioual (2024); Schmidt (2024).

¹² Schmidt (2001), xx.

¹³ Schmidt (2001), xvi–xxiv.

¹⁴ Othkmezuri (2016a), 141.

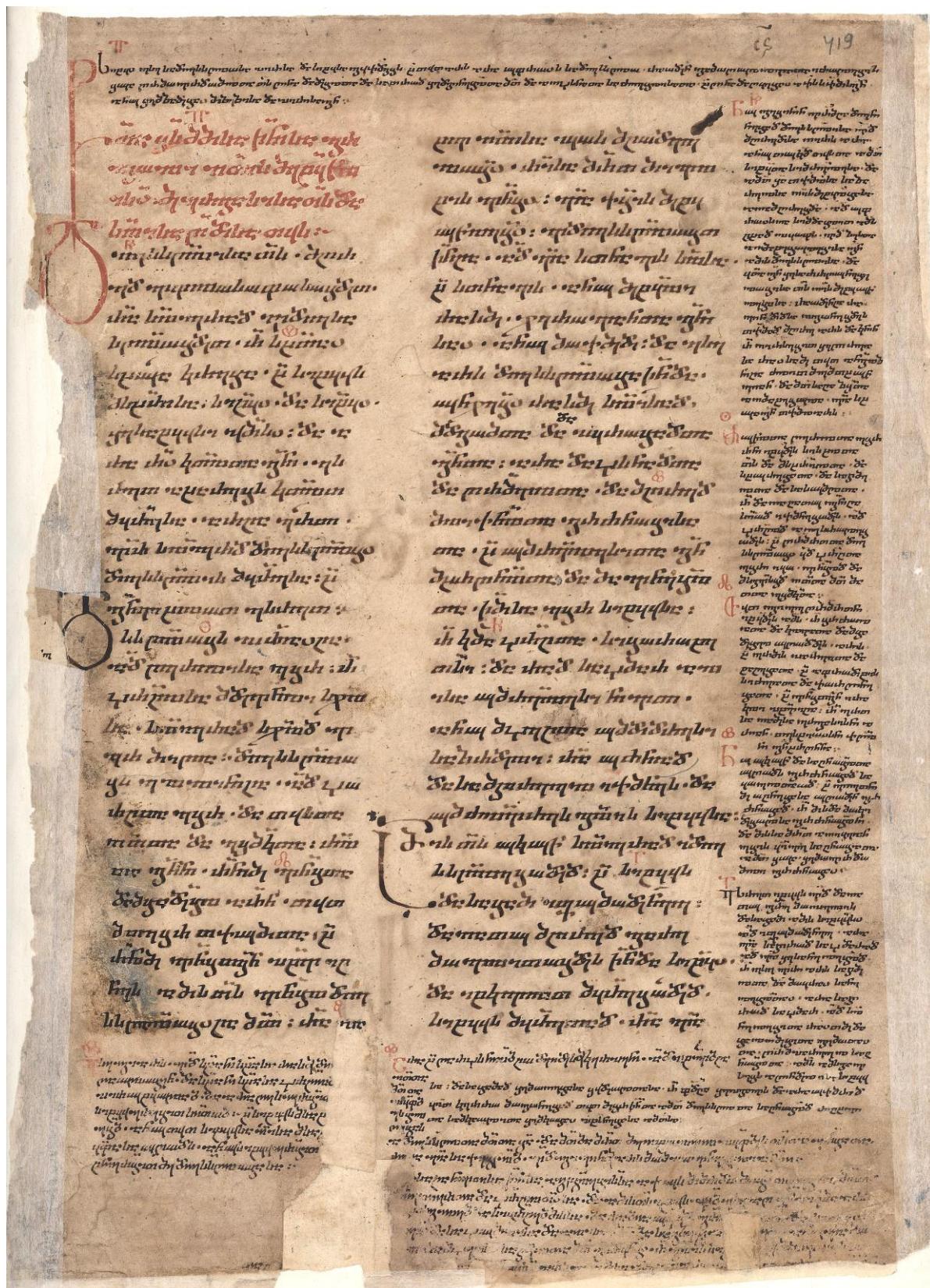


Fig. 1: MS Tbilisi, NCM A-109, fol. 211r: *Or. 41* (beginning) with Basilius' commentary

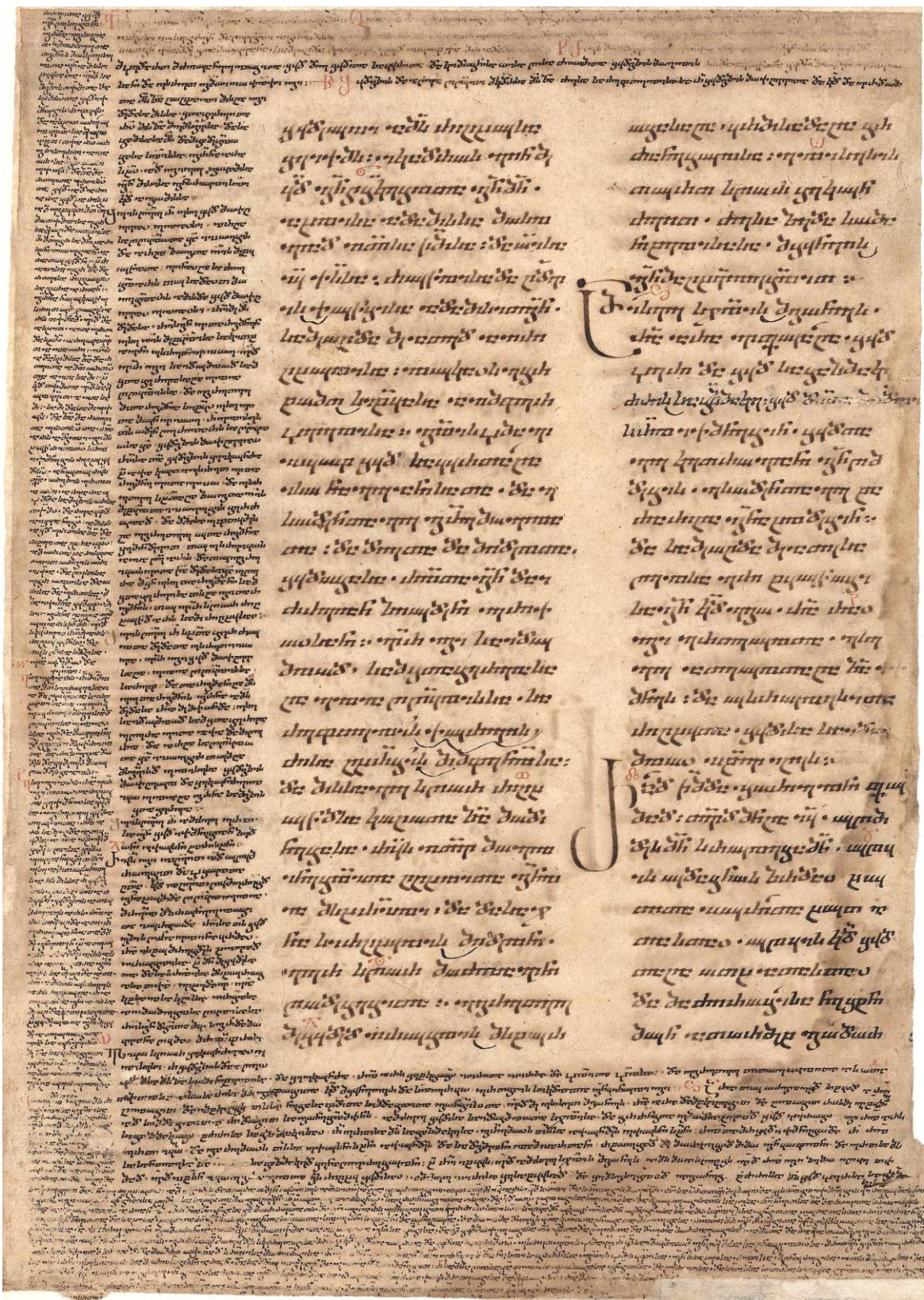


Fig. 2: MS Tbilisi, NCM A-109, fol. 212v: *Or. 41* (continuation) with Basilius' commentary

The comparative analysis of the 10th–11th century Georgian translations of Gregory the Theologian’s sermons and Basilius Minimus’ *Commentaries* reveals that (a) although there is no evidence that Euthymios translated Basilius’ *Commentaries*, he was obviously familiar with them and drew on them in his translation of Gregory’s sermons; (b) as the translator of Basilius’ *Commentaries*, Ephrem’s translation of Gregory’s sermons was decisively shaped by Basilius’ work.

a. The Influence of Basilius Minimus’ *Commentaries* on Euthymios the Hagiorite’s translation

The fact that Euthymios used Basilius’ *Commentaries* in translating Gregory’s sermons is documented in Ephrem Mtsire’s *Preface* to the *Corpus* of Gregory the Theologian’s liturgical sermons, which takes the form of a letter entitled *To Kvirike the Monk from Ephrem Mtsire*.¹⁵ The aim of Ephrem’s *Letter* is to explain to the monk Kvirike (of Alexandretta) why he had decided to produce a new translation of Gregory’s sixteen liturgical sermons, despite the existence of an earlier translation by a highly respected authority, Euthymios the Hagiorite. In this context, while discussing the peculiarities of Euthymios’ and his own translation techniques, he observes:

[Euthymios] blended the undiluted, strong wine of Theologian’s book with life-giving water, expanding the Teacher’s brief words for commoners, since our people were still ignorant and infant. This was the reason why he blended some of the commentaries into the holy Father’s sermons.¹⁶

In another part of the same *Letter* Ephrem writes:

[Euthymios] modified the shrouded meaning of Theologian’s words, as he did not trust his people [to grasp it].¹⁷

Thus, Euthymios aimed to simplify Gregory’s texts for his audience, making effective use of Basilius’ *Commentaries* in the process. In doing so, he enabled Georgian readers to achieve a deeper understanding and assimilation of Gregory’s works.

Many of Basilius’ explanations focus on Gregory’s allusive expressions, in which he hints at a subject without naming it directly. These artistic images (tropes) include periphrasis, metonyms, euphemisms, allusions, and similar devices. Euthymios’ simplification concerns these very literary figures. He does not translate them literally; rather, he conveys their original meaning, the sense in which Gregory employs them.

At the end of *Oratio 42*, composed by Gregory the Theologian upon his departure from Constantinople after the Second Ecumenical Council and the resignation from his ecclesiastical office, he bids farewell to Constantinople, to his beloved and cherished church Anastasia, and to the other local churches, also to his flock. In this context, he uses the following phrase:

Χαίρετε, Ναζαραίων χοροστασίαι¹⁸ – “Farewell, choirs of Nazarites!”

¹⁵ For the publication of the letter and its French translation see Metreveli et al. (1998), xxxii–xxxii; Gippert (2024), 585–597.

¹⁶ “ერწყელობასა ძლიერისა ამის ღმრთისმეტყულისა წიგნისა ღვნისასა განპზავებდა წყალთაგან სულიერთა, რაჟამს სიტყუათ-სიმოკლე მოძღვრისად განავრცის ლიტონისა ერისათვეს, რამეოუ ასმინ ჩეცნი ნათესავი ლიტონ იყო და ჩჩვლ მისდადმი, ამისთვე რომელნიმე თარგმანთაგანნიცა წმიდისა სიტყუათა შინა განეზავა”, Metreveli et al. (1998), xxxiv.

¹⁷ “ღმრთისმეტყულისა სიტყუათა მიფარულება, რომელი მას ნუუკუდა ერისა არ მინდობისათვეს სხეულ შეეცვალა”, Metreveli et al. (1998), xxxv.

¹⁸ *Or. 42, 26. PG 36, 489 C 8.*

The Hebrew word *nazirite* literally means “one who separates oneself”. This designation appears in the book of Judges, when the Angel tells Samson’s mother that her son will be a *Nazirite* of God (Ju. 13:5). Basilius explains this biblical allusion in the following way:

Ναζιραίους (ν.ι. Ναζαραίους) τοὺς ἡγιασμένους καὶ ἀφωρισμένους ἐκάλουν. Λέγει δὲ νῦν τοὺς μοναχοὺς, οὓς καὶ σοφώτατον ἐν ἄλλοις καὶ ἔγκριτον τῆς ἐκκλησίας μέρος ὠνόμασεν¹⁹ – “They called the consecrated and set-apart ones *Nazirites*. But now he refers to the monks, whom he also named in other (writings) ‘the wisest among others’ and ‘a chosen part of the Church’.”

Based on this explanation Euthymios renders *Nazirites* as “monks” in his Georgian translation:

გიხაროდენ, მონაზონთა კრებულნო!²⁰ – “Farewell, choirs of monks!”

Ephrem Mtsire’s translation of the explanation attracts special attention:

ძუელსა შინა ნაზირეველ უწოდდეს ღმრთისად განკუთნვილთა და განწმედილთა, ვითარ-იგი სამსონისთვე ანგელოზმან, ვითარმედ: ‘იყოს იგი ნაზირეველ ღმრთისა’. ხოლო ნუმცა ვინ მსგავსებისათვე სახელთავსა ‘ნაზირეველ’ შეკრაცხს ამათ, რამეთუ ნაზირეთი ქალაქი არს გალიოლეასამ, ხოლო ნაზირეველობად ებრაულად ‘წმიდასა’ და ‘საშოთაგან ღმრთისად განკუთნვილსა’ ეწოდების. ხოლო აქა მონაზონთათვე იტყვს, რომელთა სხუასაცა აღგილსა ‘უბრძნეს ნაწილ ეკლესიისად’ სახელ-სდებს²¹ – “In the Old Testament, *Nazirites* were called those consecrated and purified for God, as the Angel said about Samson: ‘He shall be a Nazirite of God’. However, do not confuse this with the similar-sounding word Nazarene; Nazareth is a city in Galilee. *Nazirite* means ‘holy’ in Hebrew and refers to ‘one dedicated to God from birth’. Here, he calls the monks *Nazirites*, and elsewhere he refers to them as ‘the wisest part of the Church’.”

Ephrem’s explanation is more developed and detailed than Basilius’. It explicitly cites the biblical source of the allusion and explains why a reader might misinterpret Gregory’s artistic expression. Ephrem’s translation of Gregory’s passage mentioning the *Nazirites* is:

გიხაროდენ, ნაზირეველთა მწყობრმდგომობაო!²² – “Farewell, choirs of *Nazirites*.”

In *Oratio* 14, 40, Gregory mentions Nicodemus, a Pharisee who is traditionally understood to have been a secret disciple of Jesus, based on the narratives in the Gospel of John (chapters 3, 7 and 19). According to one of these accounts, he visits Jesus at night, in secret, to discuss his teachings. Gregory refers to him with the epithet ἐξ ἡμισείας φιλόχριστος:

Νικόδημος ὁ ἐξ ἡμισείας φιλόχριστος²³ – “Nicodemus, the half-devoted-to-Christ.”

Basilius explains the meaning of this epithet:

Νυκτερινὸς γὰρ ὁν μόνον καὶ κρυπτὸς, ἀλλ’ οὐχὶ φανερὸς καὶ ἡμερινός, τῷ ἡμίσει πᾶς τῆς ἡμέρας λέγει τῇ νυκτί; Καὶ φιλῶν καὶ ἐντυγχάνων Χριστῷ. Ἡμισυ δὲ τῆς ὅλης ἡμέρας ἡ νὺξ εἰκότως ἐξημισείας φιλόχριστος καὶ λελόγισται καὶ ὠνόμασται²⁴

¹⁹ MS Paris, BnF, Coislin 240, fol. 99r; see <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b10038116t/f106.item>.

²⁰ Coulie et al. (2013), 352.

²¹ MS Jer. georg. 15, fol. 163r.

²² Coulie et al. (2013), 353.

²³ PG 35, 909 C 3–4.

²⁴ MS Paris, BnF, Coislin 240, fol. 134r; see <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b10038116t/f141.item>.

— “[Nicodemus] was only nocturnal and hidden, and not manifest and of the day; how can [Gregory] ascribe half of the day to the night? [Nicodemus] loved and met Christ. And since night is half of the whole day, he has rightly been reckoned and called half-devoted-to-Christ.”

Euthymios overlooks Gregory’s allusion and translates this passage based on Basilios’ interpretation:

ნიკოდემოს, რომელი დამით მივიდა ქრისტეს²⁵ — “Nicodemus, who came to Christ by night.”

In Ephrem Mtsire’s translation of Gregory’s *Oratio* 14, the same passage is rendered literally:

ნიკოდიმოს, კერძოდ ღმრთისმსახურმან²⁶ — “Nicodemus, the half-devoted-to-Christ.”

There is another way in which Euthymios employs Basilios’ *Commentaries*: in certain instances, he incorporates factual information drawn from them into his translation. In *Oratio* 15, 2, Gregory discusses the Maccabees:

Οὗτοι τίνες μὲν ὄντες, καὶ ὅθεν, ἡ περὶ αὐτῶν βίβλος δηλώσει τοῖς φιλομαθέσι²⁷ — “Who these men are, and from where, the book about them will make (this) clear to those who love learning...”

In Basilios’ *Commentary*, there is an explanation of this passage:

Τίνες οὖν οὗτοι καὶ διὰ τί οὕτω τετίμηνται; δηλώσει, φησί, ἡ βίβλος Ἰωσήπου...²⁸ — “Who, then, these men are, and why they have been thus honored, he says, the book of Josephus... will make clear.”

The same information can be found in Euthymios’ translation of Gregory’s *Oratio* 15:

და ამას ყოველსა მათთვის აღწერილი იგი წიგნი გამოაცხადებს და მის მიერ ისწავნ ყოველთავე სწავლისმოყუარეთა, რომელი-იგი იოსიპოს მოსწავება აღწერა²⁹ — “All this is set forth in the book composed about them by the tireless Josephus, and from it the lovers of learning will learn everything.”

The reference here is to Flavius Josephus’ *Antiquitates Judaicae*, Book 12.

There are additional instances in which Euthymios inserts the names of specific historical figures (especially, in *Orationes* 21 and 43) and identifies the sources from which Gregory cites certain passages, and in many cases, the source of the information is Basilios’ *Commentaries*. Such expansions serve an educational purpose, being directed toward lovers of learning. It is not without reason that Euthymios is mentioned in the colophons of his contemporaries as the enlightener of his own people, which implies not only spiritual elevation and strengthening in the Christian faith but also the intellectual development of his people.³⁰

Of course, it is not impossible that such an erudite translator with a Byzantine education as Euthymios might have expanded and interpreted Gregory’s sermons based on his own knowledge and that the examples cited above are merely coincidental with the explanations

²⁵ Coulie et al. (2017), 284.

²⁶ Coulie et al. (2017), 285.

²⁷ PG 35, 913 B 3–4.

²⁸ MS Paris, BnF, Coislin 240, fol. 188r; see <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b10038116t/f195.item>.

²⁹ Metreveli et al. (2000), 6.

³⁰ MS NCM A-1103, f. 117v; see also Otkhmezuri & Raphava (2022), 184, 194, 203.

found in Basilius Minimus' *Commentaries*. However, Ephrem Mtsire's testimony regarding Euthymios' use of the *Commentaries* when translating, as well as the traces of Basilius Minimus' *Commentaries* found in one of Euthymios' translations,³¹ confirm that Euthymios had access to and did, in fact, make use of Basilius Minimus' *Commentaries* when translating Gregory's sermons.

b. The Influence of Basilius Minimus' Commentaries on Ephrem Mtsire's translation

Ephrem Mtsire's *Letter to Kvirike* offers valuable information indicating that when translating the sermons of Gregory the Theologian, Ephrem's main goal was to preserve their distinctive stylistic features. Ephrem gives a very precise characterization of Gregory's literary style: for him, it is "brief-worded, *i.e.* laconic, deep, and shrouded" (სიტყუა-სიმოკლე, სიღრმე და მიფარულება).³² According to Ephrem, this style is reflected in his own translation, contributing to the "uniqueness" (უნიკურულობა) and "distinctiveness" (სხეულობა) of his rendition.³³ This description of Gregory's style closely aligns with the assessments of medieval commentators and scholiasts, including Basilius Minimus and Michael Psellos, as well as with modern scholars of medieval rhetoric.³⁴

It is generally held that in Gregory's sermons, stylistic effects, together with artistic imagery, are generated through the very syntactic structure of the text – the interplay of short and long sentences (*cola* and *commata*), the alternation of narrative and interrogative phrases, etc. Explanations of these stylistic devices occupy a significant place in Basilius' *Commentaries* and serve as a guide for Ephrem in translating Gregory's texts.

In this context, Ephrem's translation of the beginning of Gregory the Theologian's *Oratio* 38, 1 is noteworthy. Gregory's text runs:

Χριστὸς ἐξ οὐρανῶν, ἀντήσατε, Χριστὸς ἐπὶ γῆς, ὑψώθητε ... Χριστὸς ἐν σαρκὶ ...
Χριστὸς ἐκ παρθένου.³⁵

The effect of the laconic style in Gregory's prose here is created by omitting the verbs in four instances. In scholarly literature, this passage is described by as "a boundless dance of *cola* and *commata*".³⁶ Ephrem followed this manner in detail and translated the Greek text without verbs:

ქრისტე – ზეცით, მიეგებვოდით! ქრისტე – ქუეყანასა ზედა, ამაღლდით! ...
ქრისტე – გორცითა! ... ქრისტე – ქალწულისაგან!³⁷ – "Christ – from heaven, go out to meet Him! Christ on earth, be exalted! Christ in the flesh!... Christ from a Virgin!"

Ephrem's version of Basilius' explanation on this passage, which differs from the Greek original, is noteworthy:

რაეამს თქ' უას 'ქრისტე ზეცით', ნაკლულად დაუტევებს ამას, ვითარმედ
'მოვიდა'. და კუალად: 'ქრისტე ქუეყანასა ზედა', ამასცა ნაკლულებასა

³¹ See n. 5 above.

³² Metreveli *et al.* (1998), xxxv.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Bezarashvili (2004), 260–292; Mayer (1911), 27–100.

³⁵ PG 36, 312 A 3 – 313 A 1.

³⁶ Guignet (1911), 85: "une « danse éperdue » de kôla et de kommata".

³⁷ Metreveli *et al.* (2001), 51, 53.

იგურდიგმოქვეობითა ადმოუგებს... რამეთუ ესევითარნი ნაკლულნი ფილოსოფოსთა გელოვნებისანი არიან და არა ვითარ ვინ ჰგონოს, უსრულობისანი³⁸ – “When he says, ‘Christ from heaven’, he omits ‘came’, and in ‘Christ on earth’, he compensates for the missing [word] with a pause. To omit words is an art of philosophers, and nobody should assume that they are left incomplete.”

According to the explanation of this passage, the missing verbs, which are implied in each *colon*, are replaced with a pause; due to Basilius’ *Commentary*, the dynamics of the original text are preserved in the Georgian translation. In Euthymios’ translation, the verbs are added as required by the rules of Georgian grammar, resulting in the loss of the laconic effect of the original, but perfectly suiting the norms of Georgian and thus, being more acceptable and comprehensible for the Georgian reader:

ქრისტე ზეცით მოვალს, მიეგებვოდით! ქრისტე ქუეყანასა ზედა არს, ამაღლდით! ... ქრისტე გორციელ იქმნა! ... ქრისტე ქალწულისაგან იშვა!³⁹ – “Christ comes from heaven, go out to meet Him! Christ is on earth, be exalted! Christ is in the flesh!... Christ is born of a Virgin!”

As Ephrem paid particular attention to preserving Gregory’s characteristic laconism in his translation, numerous explanations in his version of Basilius’ *Commentaries* address this very feature of Gregory’s style. There are instances where such explanations have no counterpart in the Greek manuscripts known to us. We do not exclude the possibility that their author is Ephrem himself, who, drawing on his profound knowledge of Gregory the Theologian’s style and modeling himself on Basilius’ *Commentaries*, composed these explanations on his own.

For example, in *Oratio 21, 25* dedicated to Athanasios the Great, there is a phrase commented by Basilius:

Τοῦτο Ἀθανάσιος ἡμῖν⁴⁰ – γε ჩუენ ათანასი⁴¹ – “This [is what] Athanasios [did] for us.”

Basilius starts his explanation with the question regarding the first word of this phrase: Τοῦτο – ποῖον; (“This – what?”) and then elaborates at length on *what* Athanasios taught his flock. Ephrem renders this explanation with a free method of translation introducing it by the following remark:

აკლს, ვითარმედ “შემძინა” გონებით ოდენ შესადგინებელად და არა სიტყვთ გინა წესით აღსავსებელად ნაკლულევანისა⁴² – “‘Taught’ is absent and is to be supplied mentally, rather than verbally inserted into the lacuna.”

Ephrem Mtsire also relied on the *Commentaries* of Basilius when selecting the most appropriate lexical units for translating Gregory’s more artistic passages. Ephrem himself refers to this practice in his *Letter to Kvirike*:

³⁸ MS Jer. georg. 13, fol. 286r.

³⁹ Metreveli *et al.* (2001), 50, 52.

⁴⁰ PG 35, 26, 1112 B 1.

⁴¹ Coulie *et al.* (2013), 167.

⁴² MS Jer. georg. 13, fol. 345r.

რამეთუ რაჟამს ცვალებად მინდის სიტყვსავ, პირველად თარგმნითა გავჰმართო⁴³ – “For when I want to change a certain word [in my translation], I use the *commentary* first.”

By “changing a word”, Ephrem refers to modifying the vocabulary employed by Euthymios in his translations. As mentioned in the *Letter*, Ephrem knew Euthymios’ translations by heart.⁴⁴ Consequently, in his own work, he occasionally replaced certain words used by Euthymios with alternative lexical choices, and in some cases, these substitutions were directly informed by the *Commentaries*.

For example, in Gregory’s *Oratio* 15, 3 the author mentions Eliazar’s martyrdom as *προοίμιον ἀθλήσεως δεξίον*.⁴⁵ Euthymios rendered this phrase in the following way: *დაწყებად წამებისავ კეთილად* – “the nice beginning of a martyrdom”. In contrast, Ephrem replaced all lexical units of this sentence: *წინაშესავალი დუაწლისავ მარჯუენე*⁴⁶ – “the fortunate prologue of deeds”. Basilius’ explanation, commenting on two out of these three words, presumably served as a source for Ephrem’s translation:

მარჯუენებად კეთილისა და სახიერისა წილ უთქუამს, ხოლო “წინაშესავალობად” – რამეთუ პირველ ყრმათავსა იწამდა⁴⁷ – “By ‘fortunate’ [the author] means ‘nice’ and ‘good’, while [he] uses the word ‘prologue’ because [Eliazar] became the martyr before the young fellows.”

Basing himself on Basilius’ *Explanation*, Ephrem replaces Euthymios’ expositional translation with a closer equivalent of the underlying Greek text.

The usage of the *Commentaries* to convey the exact meaning of Greek lexical units is one more interesting method employed by Ephrem Mtsire. In his *Letter to Kviriike* Ephrem writes:

იგი ყოველთა ზედა ეკლესიათა განვითარი ბრწყინვავს, ხოლო ესე იშვი ვიეთოთჲსმე იდვას გულისჯმისმყოფელთათვს – “That one (i.e. Euthymios’ translation) is shining spread all over the churches, while this one (i.e. Ephrem’s own translation) is designed for curious people.”⁴⁸

Basilius Minimus’ *Commentaries* played a crucial role in forming, on the one hand, Euthymios’ expositional translation for commoners, *i.e.* for his flock, and on the other hand, for Ephrem’s word-for-word translation which reproduced in Georgian the very tone, timbre, and rhythm of Gregory’s sermons and which was intended for experienced readers. In this way, Basilius’ *Commentaries* supported both translators, though in different ways.

Picture credits

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



⁴³ Metreveli *et al.* (1998), xxxiii. See also Othkmezuri (2016a), 145.

⁴⁴ Metreveli *et al.* (1998), xxxiv.

⁴⁵ PG 35, col. 913 C 7.

⁴⁶ Metreveli *et al.* (2000), 8-9.

⁴⁷ MS Jer. georg. 15, fol. 235v.

⁴⁸ Metreveli *et al.* (1998), xxxiv.

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ბასილი მინიმუსის კომენტარების გავლენა გრიგოლ ლვთისმეტყველის საკითხავთა ქართულ თარგმანებზე

თამარ ოთხმეზური (თბილისი)

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გრიგოლ ლვთისმეტყველის თხზულებათა შუა საუკუნეების კომენტარებს შორის მნიშვნელოვანი ადგილი უჭირავს X საუკუნის ბიზანტიური მწიგნობრის, კესარია-კაპადოკიის ეპისკოპოსის, ბასილი მინიმუსის განმარტებებს, რომლებიც ქართულად XI საუკუნის ბოლოს არის ნათარგმნი შავი მთის ცნობილი ელინოფილი მწიგნობრის, ეფრემ მცირის მიერ. ქართულ ხელნაწერებში ბასილი მინიმუსის კომენტარები გრიგოლ ლვთისმეტყველის 16 ლიტურგიკულ საკითხავს ერთვის და წარმოდგენილია XII-XIII საუკუნეების ოთხ ნუსხაში: Jer. georg. 43, Jer. georg. 15, Jer. georg. 13 და ხევ A-109. ამათგან ერთში – Jer. georg. 13 – ის გაბმული ტექსტის სახით მოსდევს გრიგოლის საკითხავებს, ხოლო სამში – Jer. georg. 43, Jer. georg. 15, ხევ A-109 – აშებზე ერთვის ძირითად ტექსტს.

გრიგოლ ლვთისმეტყველის საკითხავები ეფრემ მცირემდე, წინაათონურ ეპოქაში, ნათარგმნი აქვთ ანონიმ მთარგმნელებსა და გრიგოლ ოშკელს, X-XI საუკუნეების მიჯნაზე – ცნობილ ქართველ მთარგმნელს, ივირონის მონასტრის წინამდღვარს, ექვთიმე მთაწმინდელს და ოდნავ მოგვიანებით – დავით ტბელს. X საუკუნის შემდგომი პერიოდის თარგმანების შედარებითმა კვლევამ ბასილი მინიმუსის კომენტარებთან აჩვენა, რომ, მართალია, ექვთიმე მთაწმინდელს არ უთარგმნია ბასილი მინიმუსის კომენტარები, მაგრამ ის იცნობდა ამ კომენტარებს და მათ გავლენას განიცდიდა გრიგოლი საკითხავების ქართულად თარგმნისას. ამის შესახებ საუბრობს ეფრემ მცირეც თავის ეპისტოლეში კვირიკე ალექსანდრიელის მიმართ, რომელიც ერთვის გრიგოლ ლვთისმეტყველის 16 ლიტურგიკული საკითხავის კრებულს. ის მიუთითებს, რომ ექვთიმეს „რომელნიმე თარგმანთაგანნიცა წმიდისა სიტყუათა შინა განეზავა“. როგორც ეფრემი ადნიშნავს, ამას ექვთიმე აკეთებდა იმ მიზნით, რომ გრიგოლის საკმაოდ რთული, თეოლოგიური სიდრმითა თუ მხატვრული თვალსაზრისით დატვირთული პასაჟები ადგილად გასაგები და მისაწვდომი გაეხადა ჯერ კიდევ „სიჩხოებაში“ – სიჩვილეში მყოფი, გამოუცდელი მკითხველისათვის. ამ თვალსაზრისით საყურადღებოა გრიგოლის ტექსტში დადასტურებული საკმაოდ რთული მხატვრული სახეები – ალეგორიები, ევფემიზმები, ანალოგიები, მეტაფორები, რომელთა შინაარსის განმარტება მოცემულია ბასილთან. ექვთიმეს თარგმანში ეს მხატვრული სახეები პირდაპირ კი არ არის გადმოტანილი, არამედ, ბასილი მინიმუსის განმარტებების

მიხედვით, შინაარსობრივად არის გადმოცემული. ექვთიმე თავის თარგმანებს ამდიდრებს ასევე ფაქტობრივი ინფორმაციით, რომლებზეც გრიგოლთან მხოლოდ მინიშნებებია გაკეთებული. ამ ინფორმაციის წყაროც ექვთიმესათვის ბასილი მინიმუსის კომენტარებია.

ეფრემ მცირე, რომელიც ქართულ მთარგმნელობით ტრადიციაში თავისი ბერძნულთან დაახლოებული, სიტყვასიტყვითი თარგმანებით არის ცნობილი, გრიგოლ დვთისმეტყველის თხზულებების თარგმნისას განსაკუთრებულ მნიშვნელობას ანიჭებდა საკუთარ თარგმანებში ამ ავტორის ლიტერატურული სტილის ასახვას. „სიტყუა-სიმოკლე, სიღრმე და მიფარულება“ – ასე ახასიათებს ის გრიგოლის პროზის სტილს თავის ეპისტოლებში კვირიკეს მიმართ. მისი სიტყვებით, ამ სპეციფიკის ასახვა ქმნის სწორედ მისი თარგმანების „უწევეველობასა“ და „სხუებრობას“. აშკარაა, რომ ამ საქმეში, ანუ გრიგოლის სტილის შენარჩუნებაში, მას დიდ დახმარებას უწევდა ბასილი მინიმუსის კომენტარების ის განმარტებები, რომლებშიც გრიგოლის სტილზე საუბარი. ბასილი მინიმუსის კომენტარები ასევე ეხმარება ეფრემს, გრიგოლის თარგმნისას, ზუსტი, ადეკვატური ლექსიკური ერთეულების შერჩევაში. მის ეპისტოლებში კვირიკეს მიმართ ვკითხულობთ: „რამეთუ რაუამს ცვალებად მინდის სიტყვსად, პირველად თარგმნითა გავჰმართო“. „სიტყვის ცვალებაში“ უნდა იგულისხმებოდეს ეფრემის მიერ გრიგოლის თხზულებათა ექვთიმე მთაწმინდელისეული თარგმანების ლექსიკის შეცვლა. როგორც ამავე ეპისტოლიდან ირკვევა, ეფრემი კარგად იცნობდა – თითქმის ზეპირად იცოდა ექვთიმესეული თარგმანები. დასტურდება შემთხვევები, როდესაც ეფრემი ექვთიმესეული თარგმანის ლექსიკას სწორედ ბასილი მინიმუსის განმარტებებზე დაყრდნობით ცვლის.

ამგვარად, ბასილის კომენტარებმა მნიშვნელოვანი როლი შეასრულა, ერთი მხრივ, ექვთიმეს ექსპოზიციური თარგმანების შექმნაში, რომლებიც „სიჩროებაში“ მყოფი მკითხველებისათვის იყო განკუთვნილი, ხოლო, მეორე მხრივ – ეფრემ მცირის სიტყვასიტყვითი თარგმანის შედგენაში, რომელშიც, ბასილის კომენტართა წყალობით, ოსტატურად არის ასახული გრიგოლისეული სტილის ნიუანსები, ტონი და რიტმი.