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For the History of Monastery on Athos

A well-known composition of Hieromonk George (1009-1065) – *The Life of Our Blessed Fathers John and Euthymius* represents not only a highly artistic piece of literary writing, but also belongs to historic monuments of primary significance. This piece of writing was created when Greeks were trying to appropriate the Georgian monastery on Mount Athos (“Iveroni”) (1042-1244) and did their best to achieve their goal. Therefore, according to the author’s idea, *The Life of Our Blessed Fathers John and Euthymius* should have become a document confirming rights of Georgians so that the evil of violators in the future was not forgotten.

Certainly, the piece of writing, intended to be a document, should have relied upon only credible information and using the monasterial records containing such information and according to stories narrated by witnesses, Hieromonk George managed to create a rather trustworthy piece of writing in terms of historic truth.

The fragment related to close relations between Roman and Georgian monks should be considered as an additional and new evidence of historic credibility of *The Life*. Foundation for these relations was laid after the Roman Leon came to Athos for pilgrimage with 6 disciples. According to *The Life*, “a monk arrived from Rome, <Leon>, brother of Beneventos Ducas, from a noble Roman family and famed for his virtues, that were acknowledged <both> in Rome and Greece.”¹ Upon arrival, the Georgian Fathers escaped from Leon. These Georgian Fathers, founders of the

¹ *The Life of Our Blessed Fathers John and Euthymius and Their Worthy Citizenship* as described by the Poor Hieromonk George, Georgian monks on Mount Athos: Two 11th Century *Lives of the Hegoumenoi of Iviron*, translation, notes & introduction by T. Grdzeldze, London: Bennett & Bloom 2009, chap., 14.

Georgian Monastery on Athos (“Iveroni”) imply: Ioane Varaz-Vache (died in 1006) – the first head of the monastery, Ekvtime, son of Ioane Varaz-Vache (died in 1028) – the Great Enlightener of Georgians and the second head of the monastery (1005-1019), George I (died in 1029) – the third head of the monastery and possibly (if he had not been already died), Ioane former Tornike (died in 984) – a well-known commander and defeater of Bardas Skleros. The Georgian Fathers were so fascinated with this pilgrim’s “face adorned with grace”² that they welcomed him as the person they had been acquainted with and offered him to stay on Athos. In the opinion of the Fathers, the fact that he was a foreigner should not have prevented them from doing so, as they had been foreigners themselves – “We are foreigners and you too are a foreigner.”³

The Fathers “vigorously convinced him”⁴ (Leon) to live in the Georgian Monastery together. The Romans living in Constantinople and other Byzantine towns soon became aware of this fact, “because he was a well-known and famous man.”⁵ Many visited Athos “to become monks through him.”⁶ But when the large number of visitors in the short period of time became noticeable, the Fathers, who believed that this number would increase in the nearest future, advised Leon: “Holy father, since you have been saving so many souls, it is better to tonsure them and become the cause of the Vitae of their souls and to plead <on their account> before God.”⁷ The Georgians did not restrict themselves to advice and promised a real support to the Roman monk for such initiative. This is seen from their offer: “We shall purchase a place for you and provide all that you need,”⁸ i. e. that together with purchase of the place for monastery, the Georgian Fathers undertook to assist the Roman – “all that you need”, which together with money, implied the items, tools, utensils, food, drinks, etc. required for the church.

“Although the holy one (Leon) found worldly anxiety and cares difficult”⁹, which were related to construction of the monastery and afterwards to its patronage and management, but “he did not wish to

² *ibid.*

³ *ibid.*

⁴ *ibid.*

⁵ *ibid.*

⁶ *ibid.*

⁷ *ibid.*

⁸ *ibid.*

⁹ *ibid.*

disobey the order <of the fathers>”¹⁰. So he initiated construction of a beautiful and spacious monastery, on the place undoubtedly bought by Georgians and as George the Hagiorite mentions, “with the help of our fathers, he completed the building.”¹¹

The monastery built with the assistance of Georgians functioned in the period of Hieromonk George as well, which is evidenced by the following source: “And today it is the only Roman monastery on the Holy Mount and they live a good and orderly life according to the Canons and Regulations of St. Benedict¹² whose life is described in <the Book of> Dialogues.”¹³ After construction of the own monastery, the monastic cell designed for Leon after he moved to the Georgian monastery, was left to him, according to *The Life*. This is clear from the fragment of *The Life* concerning the relations of Leon and a Georgian monk, Gabriel. These two persons were connected by a great spiritual friendship and despite the language barrier, they maintained a good mutual understanding. They often met each other and all of their meetings were longstanding. This situation is described in *The Life* in the following manner: “Whenever <Leon> visited the fathers, he would stay there for days in a cell near the cell of Gabriel. And neither of them spoke each other’s language. At twilight they would go out from their cells, praying and sat proclaiming the words of God until the bell rang for Matins.”¹⁴

It is absolutely possible that location of their monastic cells next to each other might have facilitated the friendship of representatives of two different nations to a certain extent. But the main reason must have been the fact that Gabriel the Georgian was a remarkable person, like Leon. George the Hagiorite mentions him in another fragment of *The Life* in relation to Ioane, former Tornike. The renowned commander, having

¹⁰ *ibid.*

¹¹ *ibid.*

¹² This should be the monastery of Amalfitans. *Actes d’Iviron*, p. 36. The Benedictine monastery on Mount Athos, according to Agostino Pertusi (in: *Monasteri e monaci italiani all’Athos nell’Alto Medioevo*, dans: *Le Millénaire du Mont Athos, 963-1963. études et mélanges*, t. 1, Chevetogne 1963, 217-25) was founded by Leon Benevent, the brother of the doux of Benevent Pandolfo II. He arrived to MA around 9980 with his 6 disciples, first resided with the Georgian monks and then with their help, they founded their own monastery between 980-990. The first abbot was Leon, his successor John of Amalfi, probably one of the six disciples. Paul Lemerle, *Le monde de Byzance: Histoire et Institutions Variorum*, XXII, London 1978, 548.

¹³ *The Life of Our Blessed Fathers John and Euthymius and Their Worthy Citizenship*, 2009, chap., 14.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

participated in many fights, but already very old, “he loved to relate <about his military exploits>”¹⁵. To prevent “bringing spiritual damage to both this worthy man and his own soul,”¹⁶ Ioane Varaz-Vache advised him to tell these stories to Gabriel, “who never spoke of worldly things but only of divine and spiritual <things>”¹⁷ (Gabriel the Georgian must be the holy monk, who had a vision of the Holy Mother in his sleep, who helped him to miraculously obtain the Panagia Portaitissa in the sea).¹⁸

The fact that Leon the Roman was a real person and built a monastery on Athos, adhering to the monastic Rule of St. Benedict, is proved by the monograph published by E. Amand De Mendieta *Mount Athos*.¹⁹ According to this publication, after Athanasios the Athonite built the Great Lavra on Athos, laying the foundation for the new stage of monasterial life on the Holy Mount, the believers wishing to live a monasterial life moved to this place from different countries. Italians were also among them (particularly, from Calabria, Amalfi and Rome), whose large number was mentioned by George the Hagiorite. According to Emmanuel Amand De Mendieta, Athanasios the Athonite showed great care in respect to construction of the Amalfi monastery (about the year 980). This monastery, adhering to the monastic Rule of St. Benedict, was established by Leo, brother of the Prince of Capua, Randulf II, who was largely assisted by monks of the Georgian monastery of “Iveroni”.

It is clear that the Great Leon from *The Life* by Hieromonk George – “a monk arrived from Rome” and “brother of Beneventos Ducas”²⁰ is the same person as Leo, brother of the Prince of Capua, Randulf II, according to Emmanuel Amand De Mendieta. The monastery “Hromthai” built by the Great Leon on the Holy Mount, where “monks followed the canon and monastic rule of St. Benedict,”²¹ undoubtedly implies the Monastery of Amalfitans built by Leo according to the monastic Rule of St. Benedict. The fact that “with the help of our fathers, he (Leon) completed the building”²², is repeated by Emmanuel Amand De Mendieta, who declares that Leo received a great assistance from Georgian monks of “Iveroni”.

¹⁵ *The Life of Our Blessed Fathers John and Euthymius*, chapt., 7.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Georgica*, v. 8, texts with Georgian translations, published and explanations attached by S. Kaukhchishvili, Tbilisi 1970, 265-266.

¹⁹ Amand De Mendieta E., *Mount Athos*, Amsterdam 1972, 72.

²⁰ *The Life of Our Blessed Fathers John and Euthymius*, chapt., 14.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*

All this coincidences, in terms of narration of historic facts, once again prove the informational credibility of *The Life* by Hieromonk George. At the same time, this composition allows us to make small adjustments to some data provided by Emmanuel Amand De Mendieta, which require some clarification.

Brother of Leon-Leo, Randulf II, more exactly Pandulf II (981-1014) ruled Benevento in 981-1014, and he became the Prince of Capua only in 1007. As Leon came to the Holy Mount in the early 980s, Pandulf had been the Prince of Benevento during that time. Therefore, the true situation is more exactly conveyed in *The Life* (i. e. Leon was actually “brother of Beneventos Ducas” and not the Prince of Capua).

E. Amand De Mendieta was totally right, when he mentioned that Athanasios the Athonite made a particular contribution to construction of the Monastery of Amalfitans. This outstanding person facilitated construction of several monasteries on the Mount Athos and the Roman monastery was not an exception. But contribution of Georgian monks to this private case was distinguished and rather noticeable (it was by their advice that the holy monk started construction of his own monastery). Apart from good disposition towards Leon, rather significant assistance from the part of Georgians was predetermined by the circumstance, that Iveroni possessed a lot of funds by that time (upon defeat of Sklearos, Tornike acquired the usurper’s loot in the form of treasure – i. e. precious stones of gold and silver, which according to Hieromonk George, “he received more than 1200 liters.”²³ How efficient this assistance by Georgians was, is seen from the above mentioned phrases of *The Life*: “Holy father, since you have been saving so many souls, it is better to tonsure them”²⁴ (e. i. Georgians advise Leon to build a monastery, where he will be able to carry out ordination of the Romans arriving on Athos), “we shall purchase a place for you and provide all that you need”²⁵ (it is seen from here, that the Georgians bought the monasterial place and assisted with necessary items), “with the help of our fathers, he completed the building”²⁶ (“help” of Georgians in “all matters” of construction means that the main contribution in this process was made by Georgians, but in financial form and possibly, in the form of labour required for construction).

The clarifications offered by us do not confront the corresponding data

²³ Ibid, 50.

²⁴ Ibid, 14.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

of Hieromonk George and E. Amand De Mendieta to each other, but supplement them from informational point of view. As it is found out, significance of these corresponding data is rather great and this coincidence convincingly confirms the historic credibility of one more data of *The Life* and properly demonstrates the episode of really surprising activities of Georgian monks on Athos, describing the construction of the Monastery of Amalfitans and the initial stage of its functioning.