The Reception of Aristotle's Rhetoric in the Rhetorical Theories of the Middle Ages (Basilius Minimus, Ephrem Mtsire)

The writers of the Middle Ages were well-acquainted with the classical and Byzantine rhetorical theories on the concepts of mimesis, style, beauty etc. The paper considers some more examples that attest to Basilius Minimus' (the 10th century) and Ephrem Mtsire's (the 11th century) good knowledge of rhetorical theories, namely, of Aristotle's theory of compositional organization. In this regard, it is important to consider the following three problems discussed in Aristotle's theory and draw parallels with the same problems accepted in the Middle Ages:

1) Aristotle speaks about the beauty of compositional construction of speech (τὸ γὰρ καλὸν ἐν μεγέθει καὶ τάξει ἐστίν. Arist. Poet. 7, 1450 b 9). It implies the introduction and peroration (Rhet. III, 13-14, 1414 b – 1416 a). The classical theory of constructing the rhetorical speech and the beauty of this construction is thoroughly studied in scholarly literature.

2) Aristotle also explains that the musical prelude (προαύλιον) resembles the exordium (προοίμιον) of epideictic speeches (Arist. Rhet. III, 14, 1414 b 5).

3) According to Aristotle, the epilogue is not always necessary for every speech, for instance when it is short, or the matter is easy to keep in mind (δὲ

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2 For προοίμιον and ἐπίλογος as for the parts of compositional construction of rhetorical speech in classical theories of rhetoric see Martin J., Antike Rhetorik. Technik und Methode, München 1974, 55, 147. For the traditional definition of an epilogue as a summary statement of proofs see Arist. Rhet. III, 19, 1419b. See also Mannlein-Robert I., Peroratio, in Historisches Wörterbuch der Rhetorik, herausgegeben von Gert Ueding, Bd. 6, Tübingen 2003, col. 778-788.
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Now let us draw parallels with the theoretical perception of the same problems in the 10th-11th centuries.

1) In his commentaries on Gregory the Theologian’s homilies, Basilius Minimus (as well as the translator of these commentaries – Ephrem Mtsire) discusses the problem of supplying a speech with introduction and peroration (i.e. exordium and epilogue), and appreciates them as rhetorical art and beauty. These concepts are accepted in the writings of the Greek authors since Aristotle and are widespread in the Hellenistic period, late Antiquity and the Middle ages. E.g., Basilius Minimus defines simplicity (“παρακράτος” = litonoba, cfr. λιτός) as writing without rhetorical art (τέχνη), namely, writing without preface. He talks about embellishing homilies with rhetorical art, namely with introductions and rhythmic colons. According to him,
furnishing a homily with an introduction and making its form perfect means avoiding simplicity, artlessness (ἀπλός – "litonad").

The same is true about writing without an epilogue. Basilius Minimus talks about closing homilies with prayers, i.e. the traditionally accepted masterly form of an epilogue (ἐπίλογος – "boloÁ") in Christian literature that belongs to rhetorical art (τέχναι, οροί ῥητορικοί – "Ãelovnebani metyu elTani").

2) Basilius Minimus also speaks about the practice of writing without a preface, which was turned into a new rhetorical canon by Gregory the Theologian: his homily on Maccabees starts strictly with the statement of case; the Christmas Homily also begins directly with chanting praise to God. The explanation presented by Basilius Minimus is mainly based on

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4 See Basilius Minimus's text and its Georgian translation by Ephrem Mtsire: 

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Aristotle's explanation that the musical prelude (προαύλιον) resembles the exordium (προοίμιον) of epideictic speeches (Arist. Rhet. III, 14, 1414 b 5). In this case we touch upon the problem of rhetorical theory, which was a special property of a new type of speech, but even in this case it takes its origin from a treatise of classical theorist, though it is interpreted in a new spiritual context.

3) Ephrem Mtsire's colophon appended to the second denunciation of Julian the Apostate (Or. 5) displays his knowledge of classical and Byzantine theories about the compositional units of rhetorical speech as well as his awareness of the category of beauty. The colophon deals with the question of the epilogue of the literary work and at the same time touches the problem of closing a speech without an epilogue, which is also regarded as a rhetorical skill: "For let nobody thinks that it (= Or. 5) is incomplete because of being left without an epilogue, for it is delivered in this way by the Holy [Father] in Greek, not simply, and not like other writers, but because the studies of Greeks consist of twelve arts, and each writer writes according to how he has studied from this twelve ones [NB: here Ephrem names 12 subjects of general education] ... But the saint and the great Theologian, as he was educated in all these [subjects], adorns his writings with all this. That is why appending an epilogue is one kind of art, and omitting it is another. And I did not have the silken cloth to sew the cloak; that is why I could not make it out of rough cloth. And according to closeness to Greek [literally: according to comparison with Greek], I translated the [homily] without an epilogue as it was without an epilogue [in Greek] and [I translated the homily] appended with an epilogue as it was appended with an epilogue [in Greek] ..."

Or. 5 has no epilogue in Greek, and consequently, there is no epilogue in the Georgian translation of Ephrem Mtsire. On the other hand Ephrem rendered homilies with endings with endings because he was true to the Greek original. Ephrem explains that such form of "being without epilogue"
("φιλοσόφοι") is not conditioned by the simplicity of speech ("γραφήσαντος ὑπὸ μικρᾶς ἡμετέρου") or by the manner of other writers as it is in some other cases, but it is created by scholarship and rhetorical art that was very well known to Gregory the Theologian. This was the knowledge that ornamented his works. Lack of an epilogue is a natural, and not occasional, phenomenon. According to Ephrem, appending an epilogue is one kind of rhetorical art, while omitting it is another kind. The reason is that an epilogue, being a constituent part of compositional construction, may be used as embellishment of a speech.

Here Ephrem may imply the classical theory of constructing the rhetorical speech and the beauty of such construction (see above: Arist. Rhet. Poet.). As it was told above, according to Aristotle, the epilogue is not always necessary for every speech, for instance when it is short, or the matter is easy to keep in mind (Arist. Rhet. III, 13, 1414 b1). Really, the point of Gregory's denunciative homily was easy to keep in mind, for the denunciation runs throughout the whole speech; and the short ending did not need any other addition.

The problem concerning the contents of Or. 5 is discussed below. Gregory the Theologian ends the denunciative speech (λόγος στηλευτικός) with ironical words to Julian instead of closing it with an epilogue. He says that the speech is the eternal monument for Julian in the pejorative meaning of this phrase (Or. 5, c.42. PG35, 720A). Such an ending does not need any epilogue to summarize the statement of proofs.

Ephrem is aware of the peculiarity of Byzantine theories concerning the composition. However, he adds, as was told above, that writing without an epilogue does not mean simplicity and is a skill. The question of the art of writing without an epilogue in Ephrem's theoretical source must be related to the classical Aristotelian theory (see above Arist. Rhet. III, 13, 1414 b1), as

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9 Gregory the Theologian's art and technique are evaluated in the same way by Michael Psellos (the 11th century): his works display the knowledge of all sciences (ἐπιστήμη) and art (τέχνη). See Τοῦ ὑπερτίμου Ψελλοῦ λόγος σχεδιασθεὶς πρὸς Πόθον βεστάρχην ἀξίους αὐτῶν γράψας τοῦ θεολογικοῦ χαρακτῆρος, in Mayer A., Psellos' Rede über den rhetorischen Charakter des Gregorios von Nazianz, in Byzantinische Zeitschrift, 20, 1911, 48-60, c. 1454-273. See also Bezarshevili K., The Treatise of Michael Psellos (XI c.) Concerning a Theological Style of Gregory Nazianzen's Writings (Research, translation of the text, commentaries), in Reader in Byzantine Literature, III, Tbilisi 1996, 146 (in Georgian).

well as to the Christian theory of rhetoric and aesthetics. If compared with the classical theory, the exordium is considered to be the beauty of the ornament of a rhetorical speech (κόσμου χάρας), while its absence makes the speech extempore.\textsuperscript{11}

Ephrem justifies himself and writes in the colophon that the art of rhetoric is valuable and luxurious. That is why he cannot attain it and cannot add an epilogue on his own account ("I did not have the silken cloth to sew the cloak, and that is why I could not make it out of rough cloth"). In rhetorical theories that embellished deep contents, cloak or frame as an outward ornament of the form was considered to belong to rhetorical skills.\textsuperscript{12} Although, the concept of beauty is not directly mentioned here, as was shown above, Ephrem Mtsire refers to the beauty of the art of composition as explored in Aristotle's Rhetoric and Poetics and in Basilius Minimus's commentaries, and names the valuable ornaments of rhetoric, among which the art of compositional arrangement is mentioned.

It has already been considered in research works that Ephrem presents the aspects of the concept of beauty in this colophon as well.\textsuperscript{13} It becomes obvious that Ephrem also presents here the concept of compositional construction of a rhetorical speech, namely, either appending an epilogue to a speech or sometimes ending it without a conclusion according to the theories of rhetoric.

It is clear that Ephrem Mtsire was well acquainted with classical and Byzantine theories of rhetoric; having their methodology in mind, he translated Gregory the Theologian's writings into Georgian and composed his own colophons concerning the literary-theoretical problems. The example analyzed above also confirms the opinion that Ephrem was interested in the theories of rhetoric from the earliest period of his work (when Or. 5 was translated by him)\textsuperscript{14}. It means that Ephrem from the very beginning of his activities accepted Hellenophile cultural orientation to the literary processes taking place in Byzantium, while his translation method became hellenophile only gradually.

\textsuperscript{11} Gorgias of Leontini's encomium on the Eleans is named as example of the speech extempore (Arist. Rhet. III, 14, 1415b12-1416 a 1).

\textsuperscript{12} Adornment of the deep philosophical ideas of St. Gregory the Theologian with rhetorical ornaments is compared by Michael Psellos to setting the valuable pearl of the Gospel (Matth. 13, 45-46) into a frame of gold and precious stones (Psellos, Ad Pothum, A. Mayer ed., c. 555-90).

\textsuperscript{13} Bezarashvili K., Theory and Practice of Rhetoric and Translation, 573-576.

\textsuperscript{14} About the chronology of translating Gregory the Theologian's works into Georgian see Bezarashvili K., Theory and Practice of Rhetoric and Translation, 413.