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**AN EQUILIBRE BETWEEN POETRY AND PROSE, CLASSICISM AND “POPULARITY”
(BILINGUAL CHARACTER OF BYZANTINE LITERATURE FROM PRODROMOS TO
SKUTARIOTES)**

Traditional is an extreme in the estimation of medieval perception of the world: it is denial of any originality and actuality, interpreting medieval literature only as applications of scholastic methods to language¹. Decadence is often connected with the idea of Byzantine culture: christianization was presented as a source of formalization of thought and dehumanization of culture².

“The Cambridge Medieval History” (the chapter about Byzantine literature was written by Franz Dölger) characterized the world of Byzantine authors as something artificial, more of an exercise in formal and technical skill than as a result of spontaneous inspiration or a significant experience³. Still more rigorous is R. Jenkins’ sentence: the Hellenic rhetoric became a kind of a scrounge for Byzantine speech – it made vapid the content of the latter and as a result the Byzantine repented and became obscure using a language that was far from reality. There was no poetry in Byzantium – there was only rhetorical (in the bad sense) versification – pretentious and tasteless. Any originality, any freshness, any feeling was suffocated. Byzantine records – according to R. Jenkins – were not connected with life at all, they did not serve as a means of expressing thought; they remained formal, scholastic schoolchildren’s exercises⁴.

Originality is denied also to the “works of “literature”” (characteristic is the coined term of “literature” in inverted commas!) in the voluminous description of Byzantine civilization by André Guillou; best “works” are said to be only those created by a purely religious imagination⁵. The denial of vitality in the Byzantine works, the idea of their abstractness, not connected naturally with the historical reality of the time they were written makes one see in Byzantine literature only a distorting mirror of reality which does not help perceive and understand Byzantine culture but creates only artificial hindrances, “ciphering” the meaning. Such is the estimate of Cyril Mango⁶.

If such criteria of approach to medieval literature could to some extent explain Byzantine aspiration to μίμησις in its classical works, such as Procopius or Psellos, Anna Comnene or John Cinnamus, Nicetas Choniates or Theodoros Metochites, they (criteria) could do nothing in appreciation of Byzantine poems and then prosaic versions, which began to appear in Byzantine literature since the middle of the 12th C. and have obtained their incontestable place in the history of medieval literature and language. I mean so called works written in “people’s” or “popular” language, so Prodromos (both Theodoros Prodromos and Ptocho-Prodromos), Michael Glicas, metaphrases of Nicetas Choniates, the work of Theodoros Skutariotes. Most serious problems for scholars these authors presented by the fact, that one and the same writer could produce an elegant poem remarkable for classical purist features of language of Homer or Pindarus at the same time as they wrote verses in colloquial language which has come into fashion suddenly just at the acme point of Byzantine literary classicism of the Comnenian epoch.

¹ A. Toynbee. *Constantine Porphyrogenitus and his World*. London, New York, Toronto, 1973. P. 524.

² H.-G. Beck. *Byzantinistik heute*. Berlin, New York, 1977. S. 9.

³ *The Cambridge Medieval History*, vol. 4, p. 2. Cambridge, 1967. P. 210.

⁴ R. Jenkins. *Byzantium. The Imperial Centuries: A. D. 610–1071*. New York, 1966. P. 385.

⁵ A. Guillou. *La civilisation Byzantine*. Paris, 1974. P. 334, 347.

⁶ C. Mango. *Byzantine Literature as a Distorting Mirror*. Oxford, 1975.

Significant gap between style and language of these two levels sometimes makes scholars to divide the works entitled by the same author and ascribe demotical versions to any other, mostly anonymous, writer (the Prodomos-case is classical in this respect)⁷.

It is very difficult to admit relying upon traditional criteria, that one and the same person, or writer of the same circle was able to wield the pen of a skillful poet and master of prose as well as write in archaic classical and at the same time in spoken, close to demotical, language the both.

Even more difficult were the attempts to characterize the demotical transliterations of Byzantine literature.

Just as it was in the beginning of the 20th C., when at the period of emancipation of byzantinology from the bosom of classical philology the hellenists looked down upon Byzantine literature as a whole, so ourdays, even recently, now byzantinists themselves regard the metaphrases of Byzantine classical literature as something "second hand" production. As far as language is concerned these texts are often considered as damaged and vulgarized (*vulgärgriechisch*), as in respect to cultural-historical value they were taken for simply abridged alterations, maybe curious as a literary-historical incident, but nothing more.

But just last years can be appreciated for more and more growing intent attention just to such middle- and late-Byzantine metaphrases, written rather in ordinary, than water down and impoverished language. This language been close to the everyday speech nevertheless was literary even if common. For linguists these texts are interesting as to some degree a link, a bridge between notable for its antique purism Byzantine "classical" literature (*hochsprachliche Literatur*) and colloquial, close to demotical, spoken language of so called "people's" literature (*Volksliteratur*). For historians of literature Byzantine metaphrases are important as a showing of the tendency to simplify elitarian enough in lexical-stylistic approach works by Anna Comnene and Nicetas Choniates with a view to bring the texts nearer to the general public, to enlarge thus readers' circle.

Such socio-cultural approach to the topic under discussion is connected with the special interest of contemporary byzantinologists to the social background of Byzantine historical-literary process with aspiration for understanding of the nature of readers' audience and social trend of the author's creative work.

Turned out of investigation in the latest fundamental books about Byzantine literature, as in people's language, so of high style⁸, the metaphrases of the works by Nicephorus Blemmides, Nicetas Choniates, Anna Comnene have become now the point of attraction for the specialists⁹. Such an interest has attracted the text of an anonymous metaphrase of three books (XI–XIII, or Vol. 3, p. 33.19–132.18, according to edition by B. Leib) of the Memoirs by Anna Comnene¹⁰. The only manuscript of the metaphrase there is lack of the beginning and the end of the text, so now it is impossible to know, whether there was a metaphrase of only above mentioned books or of the whole text of the "Alexias".

For its dating very important seems to be the consequent exchange of the term *Κιλικία* in Anna's work by *Ἀρμενία* of the Metaphrast. This could reflect the situation in the region of Caucasus after expelling by the Emperor John II Comnenos of Levon Rubenid in 1137 from Cilicia, or – another possibility, – after the acknowledgement by Toros of the vassalage in respect to Byzantium in the late 50s. It is also remarkable, that just the same substitution of ethnonyma one can find in the text of another metaphrase, namely of Nicetas Choniates' "History"¹¹. Very symptomatic is also the use by anonymous metaphrast of the name *πατερίνου* – instead of Anna's *παγάνου* – : this change could reflect the spread of the Bogomilism from Asia Minor westward (the term itself is fixed for the first time in a document dated from 1179). Further more. Historical interests of the metaphrasts, first of all to the relations between Byzantium and the West, special regard for "Latins", the definite distance between himself and, on the other hand, the author and heroes of the "Alexias", as well as the historical-literature context of the epoch as a whole, when by the turn of the 13th to the 14th C. there have been appeared similar expositions of Nicephorus Blemmydes, Nicetas Choniates, allow to date Anna's

⁷ W. Hörandner. Theodoros Prodomos. Historische Gedichte. Wien, 1974. S. 37–72.

⁸ H.-G. Beck. Geschichte der byzantinischen Volksliteratur. München, 1971; H. Hunger. Die hochsprachliche profane Literatur der Byzantiner. München, 1978. Bd. 1–2.

⁹ A. Pignani. Parafrasi o metafrasi (a proposito della Statua Regia di Niceforo Blemmida). — Atti accad. Pontan., 1976. Vol. 24. P. 219–225; J.-Z. van Dielen. Bemerkungen zur Sprache der sog. Vulgärgriechischen Niketasparaphrase. — Byzantinische Forschungen. 1979. Bd. 6. S. 37–77; H. Hunger. Anonyme Metaphrase zu Anna Komnene, "Aléxias", XI–XIII. Wien, 1981.

¹⁰ Anne Comnène. Aléxiade, ed. B. Leib. Paris, 1945. T. 3.

¹¹ J.-Z. van Dielen, op. Cit. S. 73.

"Metaphrase" by the Palaeologian period or even by the time of Latin Empire. To define more precisely chronological limits is for the present impossible: the text of the metaphrase goes back to the cod. Coisl. gr. 311 of Anna's original (codex C according to B. Leib), though been not the direct copy of this manuscript.

The comparison of language of the texts of the Anna's "Alexias" and its metaphrase shows some essential differences, as in lexical-grammatical, so in stylistic spheres, which have decisive importance for attribution of linguistic character of the metaphrase and attract main interest.

Very demonstrative are verbal modifications in the metaphrase. There can be clearly observed the exclusion of perfect-forms: in 97 cases perfect is replaced by imperfect, and there are also 25 cases of substitution of plusquamperfect forms by aorist, 5 cases – by presence, 15 – by imperfect. The reverse transformations of aorist and present forms into perfect one can find only in 4 cases. In the next 16 cases the perfect forms in the "Alexias" were replaced in the metaphrase by noun, adverbial and infinitive constructions. To lesser degree one can observe the replacement of forms of future tense by presence or aorist (8 cases).

Characteristic are also the tendencies of modal development of the verb, reflected in the metaphrase. The optative is forced out by conjunctive forms (55 replacements) and indicative (27), to some part also by infinitive (2), participle (4) and imperative (1). There can be hardly enumerated about 30 cases of the use of optative mood by the metaphrast (including one case which has no correspondence in Anna's text). Even less, 8 times only, the metaphrast has used infinitive, including 3 cases without correlation in the "Alexias": 11 times the infinitive construction is replaced by the direct speech, 97 times – by subordinate clauses with personal verbal forms (in this part I have calculated 83 cases of the use of conjunctive mood), and 16 times by radical change of the expression. Then, last not least, it can be caught definite tendency to replace compound verbs with prefixes by simple forms without prefixion: there are 123 such substitutions when the reverse exchange can be found in only 12 cases and 12 other compound verbs and verbs with prefixes of the "Alexias" are kept without alterations.

As far as verbal adjectives (*adjectiva verbalia*) are concerned, among 44 their replacements by other constructions (mainly by a noun or personal form of the verb) there are 35 verbal adjectives, left without any change or new-formed. Obvious is the tendency of transformation of participial constructions: there can be found 66 their replacements by subordinate clauses (but in 9 cases there are reverse exchanges), 30 – by personal verbal forms, 8 – by noun forms, 3 – by infinitive; 15 participles are kept without change.

As in the case of simplification of compound verbs, the metaphrast preferred adjectives without prefixes instead of compound ones (60 examples), though 27 adjectives with prefixes have no replacements. As regards degrees of comparison, the analysis proves that the number of adjectives in superlative degree changed into positive or comparative or just another word (38 cases) is a bit over the number of cases of superlative kept without alterations (15) or number of reverse substitution (2). The same thing can be said about adjectives of comparative degree: there are 20 of them adopted from the "Alexias", against 17 substituted by initial form or another expression.

On the other hand, the adverbial modifications in the metaphrase seem to be "conservative". That concerns the adverbs with $-\theta\epsilon\nu$ component: 25 times they are changed by other forms (including 16 times of use of prepositional constructions). In return there are 81 cases of adequate use of adverbs with $-\theta\epsilon\nu$ in accordance with the "Alexias" and 45 more cases of their intrusion into the text by the metaphrast instead of other expressions. The analysis of other replacements of adverbial forms let to conclude the increasing of prepositional constructions (23 among 41 cases of exchange). Very popular are in the metaphrase the adverbs with $-a$, typical for modern Greek.

Main alterations concerning substantives happen with verbal nouns: they are changed by subordinate clauses (35 times), by infinitive (28), by personal form of the verb in the principal clause (6), by participles (10) etc.; there are only 3 return transformations. Finally, the metaphrast 7 times changed not numerous forms of the dual.

The analysis of the development of syntax of the simple sentence has led to the following results. An intensive ousting of the Dative case by different prepositional constructions with Accusative (77 times) and Genitive (46) cases is to be observed (mainly combinations $\epsilon\iota\varsigma$ +Acc., $\pi\rho\delta\varsigma$ +Acc., $\mu\epsilon\tau\grave{\alpha}$ +Gen., $\acute{\alpha}\pi\theta$ +Gen.).

There are registered 79 cases of exchange of Dative by other constructions. At the same time it is important to take into account 22 cases of original use by the metaphrast of the Dative as well as about 100 Datives of the "Alexias" kept without change. In its turn the Genitive without prepositions is

to be supplanted (87 times) by the prepositional constructions (mainly by ἀπὸ+Gen. and εἰς+Acc.) or by general transformation of the phrase (87). About 80 Genitive cases of the "Alexias" are reproduced without changes; there are used also 6 "new" Genitives by the metaphrast. Finally, it can be traced the tendency to replace the *genitivus absolutus* construction by subordinate clauses (23 times), by its transformation into principal sentence (9) or other changes (15). The return exchanges do not exceed 4 cases.

For the syntax of the complex sentence it is characteristic construction θέλω ἵνα+conjunctive, – just one step to the Modern Greek construction θέλω νὰ+indicative. Conjunctive constructions with ἵνα are used also in place of future tense and in the sense of the imperative. Very demonstrative is usage by the metaphrast of *conjunctivus adhorativus* in form of ἄς+conj. (cf. similar Modern Greek formation).

If in the field of grammar all above mentioned innovations have the features of the definitely clear development of language, then in the sphere of vocabulary the picture is more complicated. Mostly principal are replacements of the names and first of all the terms. So, instead of archaic socio-political and military terminology the metaphrast has used the words, which could be common for the Modern Greek: ἀκρόπολις in Anna's text – κουλά" in the metaphrase, ἀνάκτορα – παλάτιον, ἀσπίς – σκουτάρι(ο)ν, Αὐγουστα – δέσποινα, δόρυ – κοντάρι(ο)ν, ἔποχος and ἵππεύς – καβαλλάρης and καβαλλικεύσας, ἑτερόστομον ξίφος – μανιάρη, θυρέος – σκουτάριν, ναῦς and πλοῖον – καράβιον, κάτεργον or μονόξυλον, παρεμβολή – κατοουνοτόπιον, στράτευμα or στρατός, σκηνή – κατοῦνα and τέντα.

The same can be noticed in respect to ethnonyma: instead of Ἴταλοί – Φράγγοι, Κέλτοι – Ἀλαμανοί, Κιλικία – Ἀρμενία, Λατῖνοι – Φράγγοι, περσικός – τουρκικός, Σκύθης – Κόμανις.

In the other cases the *termini technici* of the "Alexias" are replaced by the words of more general range of use or by more concrete in their sense: αὐτοκράτωρ – βασιλεύς, βασιλεύουσα – Κωνσταντινούπολις or μεγαλόπολις or simply πόλις.

Very significant layer of "neo-grecisms" (in inverted commas) one can find in vocabulary of the sphere of everyday life, family-relations, domestic items: ἵππος, κλίνη, λάρναξ, ἔτος, παρεία, τέμπη, χλαμύδες, λευκός, πύρσος in Anna's text is changed for the metaphrast's consequently ἄλογον, κραβάτιν, κιβάρην, χρόνος, μάγουλον, βουνά, κλεισοῦρα, ροῦχα, ἄσπρος, κόκκινος. cf. also in the metaphrase: ἀτζάκιστος, κοκκινάδα, μάγουλον, πόρτα, ρουθούνη(ον), σακκούλιν, χάνταξ. The words, spread mainly in the Modern Greek, were used by the metaphrast also in the verbal constructions, so ἀρέσω, γλυτώνω, ἐγκράζω, κατουνεύω, κοκκινίζω, κουρσεύω, ξεχνῶ, σκοτώνω, τζακίζομαι, φωνάζω; (ἐ)θέλω instead of βούλομαι, πρέπει instead of δεῖ, βλέπω instead of ὁράω etc.

But the result of investigation of lexicology of the metaphrase is far from simple. It is mostly obvious in the case of the verbs. On one hand it is clear the reduction in their quantity and the holding of meaning in one verb that of many others used by Anna. So, κρατέω is used in the metaphrase instead of 19 different other verbs of the "Alexias", λέγω – instead of 16, ποιέω – instead of 16, ἔρχομαι, οἰκονομέω and ὀρίζω – each one instead of 9 other verbs etc. So, on the first glance as if it is observed the simplification of vocabulary by direct reduction of lexical units. But on the other hand there are numerous cases, when one and the same Anna's verb is reproduced by the metaphrast in different modes. So, Anna's ἀνελίπτω is represented in the metaphrase by ἀναγινώσκω and στρεῖρω; ἀνέρχομαι by προσκαρτερέω and ὑπομένω; ἀπείργω by ἐμποδίζω, κρατέω and κωλύω.

There are also some cases of ambivalent interchange of verbal pairs, as e.g. ἀγωνίζομαι – σπουδάζω.

The metaphrast prefers for poetical phrases simple words, plain and unequivocal, so instead of Anna's δραματουργέω – κατασκευάζω, μηχανάομαι or πράσσω, for ἀρειμάνιος – πολεμιστής, for ἀρειφίλος – ἀνδρείος, for ἐπιχορηγέω – εὐεργετέω and πέμπω.

So much for the statistical data of lexico-grammatical changes of the "Alexias" text in its metaphrastic variant. What does it prove?

On one hand there are obvious demotical tendencies of evolution of Greek grammar, which features are the vanishing of Dative case and of optative mood, the transformation of forms and meaning of the infinitive, the reduction of formations with prefixes and the increase of propositional constructions, as a whole the general tendency to analytical structure of language.

But at the same time one can ascertain not just a simplification of the speech, but its more precise definition, first of all in the field of terminology, now become actual. This effect has been achieved by the use of several different terms (so τάφος in the "Alexias" vs. ὄρυγμα, σοῦδα or χάνταξ in the metaphrase; εὐνοια vs. γνώμη, πίστις and ὑπόληψις; ἡγεμονία vs. ἀρχή, βασιλεία, ἀρχηγός, ἀρχων

and κεφαλή; πορθμός vs. λιμήν, πέραμα and πόρος), which seem to be synonymous in Anna's text been distinctive from each other in the metaphrast's mind. The same result is attained by substitution of participle and absolute constructions of the "Alexias" for more concrete and less polysemantic subordinate clauses. The metaphrast seems to concrete and precise the action and he has succeeded in it. For specification and detailing could serve also the usage by the metaphrast of special terms in the place of Anna's descriptive expressions, so τόξα and τζάγγραι instead of ἀκροβολισμοί; σαγίττα and τόξον for βέλος; χρυσόβουλλον for ἔγγραφον, κάστρον, or χώρα for πόλις, then – ἀποκρισιάριος for πρέσβυς and βίγλα for σκοπός.

That is proved by analysis of stylistic transformations in the metaphrase, as well remarkable for some noted pleonasms. All the stylistic innovations, including those which lead to the loss in respect to high artistic value, have in the metaphrast's text their expedient character. His language is a current, language, common to everybody, with household words and colloquial expressions, as on lexicogrammatical, so on stylistic levels. But the metaphrast is not a stranger to stylizing and rhetorical treating.

So, in the case of the metaphrase of Anna's "Alexias" one deals not so much with "vulgarized" or folk-speech simplification and adaptation, as with the work so much distinguished in its belles-lettres character, as the Anna Comnene's "Alexias" itself. But it is written in a language of another colloquial-stylistic level. Similar conclusions has presented J.-Z. van Dieten by analysing the metaphrase of historical account by Nicetas Choniates¹².

Thus can be determined the place of Byzantine metaphrases in the history of Greek literature¹³ in respect to their linguistic "adherence" and the tendencies of development of language. Thus can be also fixed their role in socio-cultural life of medieval Greek population.

¹² Ibidem.

¹³ M.V. Bibikov. *Istoricheskaja literatura Vizantii*. St.-Petersburg, 1998. S. 181–186.