

The Essence and Purpose of Intertext in Hagiographic Works Translated by Euthymius the Athonite

Irakli ORZHONIA*

Abstract

The scope of the present article is hagiographic texts translated from Greek by Euthymius the Athonite, and the aim of the research is to find out the essence and purpose of their intertext.

The study of the material revealed that the authors of the hagiographic works, describing the life-martyrdom of a particular saint, are based on three types of sources: the Scripture, historical sources and patristic sources. While citing the Bible, they use three forms: analogy with the Scripture, paraphrasing the Scripture, quoting from the Scripture. As a rule, the authors by no means offer a specific reference to which book of the Bible they used because the texts about saints were written for the community within the church, and implied that the readers would understand all the analogies, paraphrases or quotations.

Intertexts, connected with the most authoritative book – the Holy Scriptures, obviously, did not have only an artistic purpose. Their role should also be appreciated in the cultural-religious context: the writers of the lives of the saints tried in this artistic way to show the continuity of the divine works conveyed in the Scripture and their close connection with modernity, the spiritual unity of the heroes of the hagiographic writings with the biblical saints, whose ultimate goal was to strengthen the Christian faith and address the broad masses.

Using historical sources, the authors provide additional material to the reader, while referring to the patristic monuments; they offer a deep, thorough and theological discussion of the events or facts conveyed in the work enriched with appropriate terms.

Keywords: *hagiographic works, Euthymius the Athonite, intertexts, Scripture, patristic sources*

Introduction

Christian theology, as an ecclesiastical science, combines many written genres, such as bibliology, exegetics, dogmatics, polemics, hagiography, asceticism, mysticism, homiletics, Canon Law, liturgy, Apocrypha, history of the Church, ecclesiastical poetry. Each of them is a field of important value, being closely related to the others. Any issue, studied in any of these disciplines, requires a complex approach and consideration of all the data provided by different ecclesiastical genres.

* Teaching-Research Institute for Interdisciplinary Humanities, Tbilisi, Georgia,
irakliorzhonia@mail.ru

The field of research proposed in this article is hagiography, and its objective is to identify the essence and purpose of the intertext in the works belonging to this genre. Hagiography, as a branch of ecclesiastical literature, originated in the Roman Empire, where many martyrs emerged because of the persecution of the Christian Church, which took place during the first three centuries, and, naturally, there arose the need to describe their merit and pass them on to future generations.

The process of creating hagiographical texts was not limited to the first three centuries and, despite the declaration of Christianity as the state religion in the Roman Empire, it continued even after the cessation of persecution and the decline in the number of martyrs. In the epoch of peaceful circumstances around religious life, the objective of the authors of the lives of Christian figures was to tell the readers about spiritual (rather than physical) martyrdom endured daily by people of remarkable virtues.

Greek hagiographical texts are divided into two parts according to their time of origin and characteristics of contents: pre-Metaphrastic and Metaphrastic editions. Texts created from the beginning of hagiographical literature up to the 10th century were usually written in simple language without extension, and precisely those texts were called “pre-Metaphrastic editions”. In the 10th century, Symeon Metaphrastes († 1000 AD), by refining and extending the hagiographical works of the pre-Metaphrastic genre, created renewed editions of “Lives” which were called “Metaphrastes” (Cross and Livingstone 2005).

This article examines three hagiographical texts of the pre-Metaphrastic edition, translated from Greek by Euthymius the Athonite. Very recently, these texts were academically published in Georgia (Gigashvili 2021). The intertext, as one of the important elements of the artistic structure of the writings, has its specific purpose. It manifests itself differently in works of different genres, which is also a natural phenomenon. Distinctly, the nature and purpose of the intertext of the hagiographical genre cannot be identical to the essence and purpose of the intertexts in the works of secular literature. The objective of the analysis presented here is to find out what kind of texts the authors chose, where from and for what purpose they selected them to be incorporated in their works.

Discussion

The research has established that the authors of hagiographical writings rely on three types of sources: 1. the Holy Scripture; 2. historical sources; 3. patristic sources, when describing the life and martyrdom of a particular saint.

1. Verification from the Holy Scripture

The investigation proved that, in the hagiographical works, the authors employ three forms of biblical testimony: a) analogy with the Holy Scripture; b) paraphrase from the Holy Scripture; c) quotation from the Holy Scripture.

a) Comparative analogy to the Holy Scripture

The following excerpt is the opening paragraph of “The Martyrdom of Eustathius Placida” (1st-2nd centuries):

The present legal teaching is for people to distinguish goodness and perform good deeds. It teaches them to do the same things that they wish for themselves from others; It also trains them to thank the merciful God in a way they expect from whom they had done good to (Gigashvili 2021: 25).

Several notable analogies can be found in the fragment above. In particular, according to the hagiographer, there is “natural teaching”, which allows people to distinguish between good and evil. These words are based on the Apostle Paul’s doctrine of “natural law”. The following appropriate excerpt confirms the above statement:

For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God’s sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous. Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, **do by nature things required by the law**, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness (Aland 2001: 523).

Thus, according to the apostle, natural law, harmonized with the voice of conscience, is a spiritual force of such power that enables a person to attain the knowledge of the Truth if he has an understanding attitude towards it. The same is indicated by Eustathius’ biographer, when he attributes the concept of “natural teaching” to the ability to distinguish between good and evil, and identifies it as the reason for Placida’s conversion.

Furthermore, according to the author, by following the above-mentioned “natural teaching” and conscience, a person can cognize the Truth, the most significant reality: “One should treat others, as he would like to be treated by others.” These words were pronounced by the author in analogy with the teaching of Jesus Christ, which He gave in His Sermon on the Mount, the doctrine known as the “Golden Rule” of the Gospel:

“Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them” (Aland 2001: 22).

The same “Testimony of Eustathius” describes how Jesus Christ appeared to the above-mentioned figure between the horns of a deer, and Placidia, seeing this miracle, became His believer. His biographer responds to the above-mentioned in the following way:

But the compassionate God, Who in various ways affects a man’s Salvation and by means which He alone knows sets him upon the true path, ensnared the hunter. He manifested Himself, not through the agency of another as He did to Cornelius through Peter, but directly, as He did to Paul (Gigashvili 2021: 27).

The author sees an example of Eustathius’ miraculous conversion to Christianity in the Holy Scripture and refers to two events in the Bible: 1. The baptism of Cornelius by the Apostle Peter (see Aland 2001: 443-448); 2. The conversion of the Apostle Paul (see Aland 2001: 439-440). The purpose of the comparative analogy given above is to help the reader realize that the story of Placida does not follow the way of the conversion of a person to the true faith by another person, as the Apostle Peter did with Cornelius and his family. Rather, there follows the revelation of God granted to the Apostle Paul while the latter was on his way to Damascus, seeking to arrest Christians when Jesus Christ Himself appeared to Paul, the Chief Apostle, without anybody’s intercession. According to the author, a similar event occurs in the case of Placida when, while chasing a deer, he sees Jesus Christ among its horns and, having seen this miracle, converts to Christianity.

In the same work, the author of “The Martyrdom of Eustathius” describes the following:

God showed him a miracle, which was nothing different from His almighty Power, as nothing can transcend His Might; The Lord worked a wonder as He had done when He opened the donkey’s mouth and the animal spoke to Balaam. He showed him the image of the Holy Cross, more glorious than the brightness of the sun, which appeared over the horns of the deer, and between its horns, He revealed His Holy Face to him, which He assumed for the sake of our Salvation. He made the deer speak with a human tongue through which He spoke to him, saying: “Placida, why are you persecuting Me? (Gigashvili 2021:28).

Balaam, mentioned by the author, is one of the Biblical characters who lived in Mesopotamia during the Exodus. According to the Holy Scripture, the

magus Balaam, who went to curse the chosen nation of the Old Testament against the will of God, was reproved by his own donkey who spoke to him (cf. Rahlfs 2006: 255-256). The present account draws a parallel between the above biblical story and the event that befell Eustathius, for, according to the biographer, as in the case of Balaam, God (Jesus Christ) addresses Eustathius through a deer, which speaks to him (cf. “and called him, and spoke unto him through the deer”). Based on the last example, we can freely state that in some cases analogy may be only partial and exclude full similarity since, in the case of the comparison of the above biblical or hagiographical events, the analogy is related to the speechless creatures (the donkey and the deer) and in no way to the persons (Balaam or Eustathius). According to the Holy Scripture, Balaam the Magus’ action is conditioned by covetousness and deserves a negative evaluation, while Placida, according to his biographer, is one of the most distinguished figures who suppressed in himself all worldly passions and earned the crown of righteousness. In this case, we draw attention to one more situation and cite an excerpt from “the Martyrdom of Anthimus of Nicomedia” (3rd-4th centuries): “He embraced with his soul and mind the Mother of virtues - the love of God” (Gigashvili 2021: 72).

The author’s reference to love as the most sublime virtue is grounded on the Holy Scripture. For example, in the Epistle of the Apostle Paul we read: “And now abideth faith, hope, love, these three; *but the greatest of these is love*” (Aland 2001: 598). John the Theologian, on the other hand, offers a more transcendent definition of the meaning of the term “love” and attributes it to God as His personal Name “God is love” (Aland 2001: 817).

Thus, the author, praising Anthimus, displays the martyr’s distinctive spiritual dignity to the reader. In attaining his objective, he is guided by the analogy of biblical teaching and, grounding his standpoint on the Holy Scripture, presents the High Priest of Nicomedia as the person who aspires to attain the supreme virtue - love.

b) Paraphrase from the Holy Scripture

The same work, “The Martyrdom of Anthimus” (3rd-4th centuries), also has the following entry:

He adorned this city and church the most with all his possessions and wealth, and converted to Christianity not only the inhabitants of this city but the whole region (Gigashvili 2021: 72).

The above-given appraisal of the figure who lived and worked in Nicomedia should be divided into two parts. The first one, which describes the activities carried out by Anthimus, how he adorned the city of Nicomedia and the church situated in it, belongs to the author himself. As for the following one, since the author's objective was to show not only Anthimus' contribution to the improvements in his home town (Nicomedia), but also his deeds done throughout the entire region, the paraphrase of the relevant psalm was considered to be the best solution, and the mentioned fact was expressed as: "The rumour of his work spread all the earth and his miracles - to the end of the world". The original source of the cited quotation is Psalm 18. The appropriate place in the psalm reads: "Their rumor spread all the earth, and their words - to the end of the world" (Rahlfs 2006: 17).

A comparative analysis of the texts established that, while paraphrasing the biblical sentence, the author made certain alterations. In particular, the psalm has the plural pronoun "Their" twice (cf. "Their rumor", "their words"), which in both cases the author replaced with the singular "His". In addition, one word ("work") was added to the first part of the quotation from the psalm, thus giving it the following meaning: "The rumor of his work" (cf. "The rumour of *his work* spread all the earth"). As for the concluding part of the sentence, the author uses paraphrase here as well and, instead of the word "words" (cf. "their words") in the psalm, he suggests the term "Miracles" (cf. and his *miracles* - "to the end of the world"). It is obvious that as a result of such an intervention, the original source undergoes some changes, but the essence conveyed in it is fully preserved.

c) Quotation from the Holy Scripture

In another section of the writing, while describing the life of the high priest from Nicomedia, the author tells the reader about the ordination of Anthimus as a clergyman:

Then the archbishop of the Church, placed him under the yoke of church ministry, and ordained him as archdeacon, and after a short time, elevated him to the rank of a priest, as it is written, they glorified the Lord on the thrones of the elders (Gigashvili 2021:73).

The fact is that the author himself uses the word "written" to indicate that the concluding part of the sentence is quoted from some source, but he does not specify its origin. The above phrase can be clearly identified as a

quotation from a psalm, the appropriate place of which reads: “Praise him in the assembly of the elders” (Rahlf’s 2006: 120).

Special explanation should be provided for the purpose of citing the biblical verse proper (rather than any other). We will first draw the readers’ attention to the fact that the author suggests it as a continuation of the information about Anthimus’ ordination as a priest. The fact is that the Greek term *πρεσβυτερος* is used in it, which, in everyday speech means “old man”, “elder”, “elderly man”; however, in ecclesiastical texts, the same term, in the appropriate context, is translated as “priest” (Lampe 1961: 1130).

Thus, while narrating the story of Anthimus’ ordination as a priest, the author gives an excerpt from the psalm in which the relevant term and the essence of the event are best combined: As a Priest (Greek: *πρεσβυτερον*), i.e. young Anthimus, who was elevated to the rank of a priest and was seen by many as an experienced person of deep spirituality, as elderly men are, will be glorifying God with his own way of life.

2. Historical sources

The author of “The Martyrdom of Anthimus of Nicomedia” describes in his work the circumstances in the early fourth century in Nicomedia and its surrounding areas, when the Christians living in that territory had to undergo the most difficult trial – Emperor Maximilian unleashed a severe persecution of these communities. According to the author, that persecution claimed the lives of thousands of believers who were burned alive. Here is the appropriate place:

The power of his teachings is attested to by the excellent and glorious, marvelous man Inde, the servant of the king’s palace. As a result of the teachings of the great Anthimus, he abandoned the pleasures of the king and the royal court, and placed the crown of torture on the head together with the maid of honour Domna, who had been baptized by the previous high priest Cyril. At the time of Anthimus, 20 000 martyrs, including Mardonius, Migdonius, Peter, Dorotheus and Zeno, were burned brave men who voluntarily shed their blood for the love of Christ (Gigashvili 2021: 74).

The fact is that Eusebius of Caesarea, who lived in the 3rd-4th centuries and witnessed the persecution preserved in the Martyrdom of Anthimus, later described it in detail in the Eighth Book of “Ecclesiastical History” (see Schaff and Wace 1904: 323-341). Moreover, the same Eusebius gives information about the martyrdom of Anthimus as well. It is noteworthy that the five figures mentioned only by name in the Martyrdom of the high priest

of Nicomedia – Mardonius, Migdonius, Peter, Dorotheus and Zeno – are also mentioned in writing of Eusebius; however, the latter also draws special attention to their lives and activities.

3. Patristic sources

An in-depth analysis of hagiographical works reveals that, in discussing theological issues, the authors sometimes used teachings preserved in ecclesiastical texts. This time we would like to focus on one of them: the life of Eustathius Placida (re-examining this passage with a different emphasis): He showed him the image of the Holy Cross, more glorious than the brightness of the sun, which appeared over the horns of the deer, and between the horns, He revealed His Holy Face to him, which He took for the sake *of our salvation* (Gigashvili 2021:28).

The author of Eustathius' Martyrdom in the aforementioned section relies on one of the most important teachings of Christian theology – Soteriology: God beheld by Placida between the horns of the deer is Jesus Christ, who took human form and the eternal God revealed Himself to the Universe as a Man to save the human race.

Special attention should be paid to the author's statement, according to which *"for our salvation"* God joined in His own hypostasis the human form. It is to be especially emphasized that the highlighted words are the teaching conveying the most existential Christological dogma preserved in the Christian "Creed", and, undoubtedly, it is precisely on this "Creed" that the author relies while giving his explanation of the theological issue stated above. The relevant section of the "Creed" is:

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the only-begotten, begotten of the Father before all ages. Light of light; true God of true God; begotten, not made; of one essence with the Father, by Whom all things were made; Who for us men and *for our salvation* came down from Heaven. (Schaff 1896: 58-59).

Thus, the terminological and syntactic coincidence between the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed and the corresponding sections of Eustathius' Martyrdom shows that the original source used by the author of Placida's Life is the monument of dogmatic content known as the "Creed".

The example above is another proof that the authors of the Greek pre-Metaphrastic editions translated by Euthymius the Athonite, in addition to conveying the basic history related to a particular saint, were

guided by patristic sources and by the relevant terms preserved in them, while analyzing theological issues.

Our objective in the following part of this discussion is to indicate the above-mentioned theory, this time with reference to the final part of the Martyrdom of Eustathius Placida: *“This is the work of these saints, this is the end of their glorious deeds. All who will be worthy of their remembrance, and will regard them as helpers, will find the goodness which is by the grace of our Lord, Jesus Christ, which is the glory and steadfastness with the Father and the Holy Spirit to the ages of ages. Amen.”*

A similar epilogue is found in Theodor of Perga’s Martyrdom: *“Theodore, his mother Philippa, and two horsemen were executed on the 20th of August, during the reign of Antoninus, and our Ruler is Christ God, who is our glory and endurance with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Amen to the ages of ages!”*

A conclusion along the same lines is offered by the biographer of Anthimus of Nicomedia:

The Christians came at dusk, took the honored corpse, and buried it in a place of honour as a fragrant ointment, a treasure of healing, and the light of believers, with the grace and humanity of our Lord Jesus Christ, the true God and Father, glory be to the Father and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, to the ages of ages, Amen (Gigashvili 2021: 83).

The texts we have referred to show that all three sources offer sentences containing virtually identical content and terms. Likewise, in the discussion offered above, in the given case, the author of all three texts is guided by ecclesiastical sources. In particular, liturgical books are essentially replete with quotations of the same form.

As the above sources testify, while working on the endings of their writings, the authors of the hagiographical works of the pre-Metaphrastic edition, translated by Euthymius the Athonite, were obviously guided by ecclesiastical written sources because their objective was to conclude the description of the lives of figures devoted to their faith with the glorification of the One God of Three Persons, which they believed in.

Conclusions

Based on the analysis of the three hagiographical works of the pre-Metaphrastic edition, translated by Euthymius the Athonite, the following conclusions could be drawn:

1. The authors use three forms of biblical testimony: **a)** a comparative analogy with the Holy Scripture; **b)** paraphrases from the Holy Scripture; **c)** quotations from the Holy Scripture. As a rule, they do not specify in any of the cases which book of the Bible they referred to for their quotations because the texts of lives and martyrdom were written for the community within the Church, and it was implied that the readers would understand what the original source of all analogies, paraphrases, or quotations was. In addition, the observation shows that the authors of the pre-Metaphrastic texts studied, in contrast to the other two cases mentioned above, while citing from the Holy Scriptures, prepare the readers in advance by starting the quotations with “For it is written...”, thus indicating in particular that, in such cases, the author’s narrative continues with a sentence attested by another source.

2. On the basis of a comparative study of the three pre-Metaphrastic editions and ancient historical sources, we can state that the authors of the indicated hagiographical works are in some cases also guided by sources containing historical content, and enrich their creations with the relevant information contained in them.

3. While discussing theological issues proper, the author of all three hagiographical works is guided by patristic texts and cites the content of the teachings, including relevant terms from those texts without any alterations.

As for the objectives of the intertexts discussed above, it is evident that, since hagiography is a genre of ecclesiastical literature, while conveying the life of a saint, the authors referred to a biblical analogy, a quotation or a paraphrase relevant to the context of their story. They did so in order to testify to the uniqueness of the events narrated in the text with the examples of the most authoritative book for Christians – the Holy Scripture. However, the reference to the historical sources was conditioned by the rich factual material preserved in them, which allowed the writer to give the information he was interested in when necessary. Alongside it, the author’s purpose while referring to patristic monuments is to offer the reader a deep and thorough theological discussion, enriched with relevant terminology.

Funding

This study was supported by Shota Rustaveli National Science Foundation of Georgia (SRNSF) [Grant #FR-19-4294, ‘Electronic Scholarly Edition of the Translated Hagiographic Heritage of the Athos Scribal-Literary School (Part I)’].

References

- Aland, K., Mattew, B., Martini, C., Metzger, B. and Wikgren, A. (2001) *The Greek New Testament*. Bible Society of Armenia.
- Cross F.L. and Livingstone E.A. (2005) *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*. Oxford. Oxford University Press.
- Gigashvili, K. (ed.) (2021) *Translated Hagiographic Heritage of the Athos Scribal-Literary School (Part I), Euthymius the Athonite, volume I*, Tbilisi.
- Lampe, G. W. H. (1961) *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*. Oxford. Oxford University Press.
- Schaff, P. (1896) *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. II, New York.
- Schaff, P. and Wace H. (1904) *A select library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, translated into English with prolegomena and explanatory notes under the editorial supervision of Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, volume I*, Eusebius, Church History, New York.