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Ephrem Mtsire's Translation Technique Based on the Pseudo-Athanasius of Alexandria's Homily "Sermo de descriptione Deiparae"¹

Abstract

This study explores the translation methodology of Ephrem Mtsire, a significant figure in Georgian Christian literature, through a detailed examination of his Old Georgian translation of the homily *Sermo de descriptione Deiparae* (CPG 2269) attributed to Pseudo-Athanasius of Alexandria.

The research is based on a comparative textual analysis of the Georgian translation and the Greek original. The methodology employs a comprehensive, multi-layered approach that combines historical-paleographical analysis, textual criticism, and comparative philology. The paper underscores Ephrem's early, pre-Hellenophilic translational style by comparing the Georgian translation with the Greek source. The analysis uncovers frequent additions, omissions, grammatical modifications (such as changes in number and the substitution of participial constructions), and stylistic adaptations (e.g., hendiadyses and rhetorical devices). Particular attention is given to Ephrem's dual method of quoting Scripture: using existing translations for verbatim biblical quotations and translating paraphrastic or authorially modified scriptural references independently. The translation of the homily, preserved in the autograph manuscript S-1276, exemplifies a model of dynamic equivalence and suggests a reader-oriented strategy, while maintaining significant fidelity to the rhetorical structure and theological nuances of the Greek original. These features support attributing the translation to Ephrem Mtsire and situating the work within the earlier stage of his career, prior to the 1090s.

Keywords: *translation technique, Ephrem Mtsire, Pseudo-Athanasian homily*

1. Introduction

This article examines Ephrem Mtsire's translation technique through his old Georgian version of the homily *Sermo de descriptione Deiparae* (CPG 2269), attributed to Athanasius of Alexandria. By comparing the Georgian text with its Greek original and conducting a textual analysis, the study highlights the linguistic and stylistic features of the translation. Based on these observations, the paper aims to determine which phase of Ephrem's translational activity this work belongs to. Particular attention is given to elements indicating that the homily was translated during an early period of Ephrem's career. More broadly, the study

¹  This research was funded by the Shota Rustaveli National Science Foundation of Georgia, PHDF-23-3469

of pseudepigraphic homilies in any language is acknowledged as a particularly difficult and complex field. Scholars consistently emphasize the challenges posed by questions of authorship, transmission, and textual adaptation in this corpus. The scholar of the Slavonic translations of the Pseudo-Athanasian writings notes that research has shown that a large part of these works does not belong to Athanasius but rather to various other authors: *As we have shown in an earlier study, most of these texts are translations from the known Greek originals. Two of them were possibly composed by Basil of Seleucia (d. ca 458), two others either again by Basil or John Chrysostom (349-407), or Athanasius. One text belongs to an anonymous author, and there is one whose Greek original we did not find, namely, the Homily on the Man Born Blind* (Gritsevskaya & Lytvynenko, 2020, p. 190).

Athanasius of Alexandria was consecrated as Archbishop of Alexandria in 328 by Alexander of Alexandria. During his 46-year episcopate (he died on May 2, 373), he faced numerous persecutions and trials. The Meletians, Arians, and Eusebians – supported by the imperial court and driven by slander – exerted enormous pressure on him, leading to his deposition and exile from the city on five occasions. Nonetheless, he successfully refuted all accusations in ecclesiastical councils and judicial proceedings, restoring his episcopal dignity each time (Gwynn, 2012, pp. 1-6).

In both the author's master's thesis and the introduction to the text published in the *Mravaltavi* of the National Center of Manuscripts (Tsetskhladze, 2022, pp. 172-198), the homily is attributed to Athanasius of Alexandria, following manuscript tradition.

The homily *Sermo de descriptione Deiparae et Josephum*, translated into old Georgian as *siṭquai aḡcerisatuis qovladēmidisa kalculisa da ḡmrtismšobelisa mariamisa da iosebistuis, romelman miithova igi* [Homily on the census involving the most holy virgin Mary, mother of God, and Joseph, her betrothed], is attributed to Athanasius of Alexandria. It is an exposition of the Gospel episode describing Mary and Joseph's journey to Bethlehem (Luke 2:1-7). The work presents its author as both rhetorician and exegete. The text includes a profound interpretation of the Scriptures and a theological perspective on the providential preparation for Christ's birth. The homily is preserved in twenty Georgian manuscripts, divided into two groups: an early group (11th-14th centuries) and a later group (15th-19th centuries). The earliest manuscripts, particularly S-1276, an autograph of Ephrem Mtsire, critically establish the text. This work has been published in the periodical *Mravaltavi* of the National Center of Manuscripts (Tsetskhladze, 2022, pp. 176-177). However, further research into other pseudepigraphic homilies strongly indicates that the homily should be classified as Pseudo-Athanasian due to several historical, stylistic, and theological factors.

In Byzantine literature, creating compilatory works was a common practice. Similarly, anonymous authors often attributed their writings to prominent, deceased figures, circulating these texts under their names. This practice facilitated the integration of such works into ecclesiastical tradition. The attribution of the homily to Athanasius likely reflects his theological authority and the prestige associated with his name (Sachot, 1977, p. 241). It is also possible that scribal errors accumulated over time during manuscript transmission contributed to this attribution.

According to Elene Metreveli's historical-paleographical research, Ephrem Mtsire is regarded as the translator of the homily. A textological study further corroborated her view by comparing the translation with the original Greek text and analysing the translation techniques. These studies uncovered a clear link between the methodology employed in translating the homily and Ephrem's translation approach in other works (Tsetskhladze, 2022, pp 174-175).

2. Methodology

The research methodology is a comprehensive, multifaceted approach integrating historical-paleographical analysis, textual criticism, and comparative philology. The attribution of the homily *Sermo de descriptione Deiparae* to Ephrem Mtsire is based on Elene Metreveli's historical and codicological research, which is supported by a detailed textual comparison between the old Georgian translation and the presumed Greek original. The core of the study is an examination of parallel examples of old Georgian texts translated from Greek, with a thematic classification of different translation strategies. These include instances where the Georgian translator introduces new terms, preserves certain Greek expressions, translates New Testament quotations, and constructs hendiadyses, among other translation techniques. The results are then compared with Ephrem Mtsire's other translated works, leading us to conclusions about the degree to which this particular text can be attributed to him. This comparative analysis of translation techniques supports the identification of Ephrem as a translator and provides a deeper understanding of his translation technique and approach.

3. Two Stages of Ephrem Mtsire's Translation Activity

Ephrem Mtsire's translation activity laid the foundation for developing Georgian philological principles. His translation technique has been thoroughly examined and is categorised into two periods: pre-Hellenophilic and Hellenophilic. Early on, like the Athonite Fathers, Ephrem aimed to produce translations that would appeal to the reader, which resulted in expansions and certain modifications in his initial works. However, from the 1090s onwards, Ephrem changed his approach, focusing more on accuracy in translation. This shift is believed to have been influenced by Greek criticism, which accused Georgian translations of inaccuracy. A notable example of this transition from the pre-Hellenophilic to the Hellenophilic period is Ephrem's translation of the 16 liturgical words of Gregory the Theologian, recognised for its exceptional precision (Otkhmezuri, 2011, pp. 19-23; Tvaltvadze, 2009, pp. 3-4; Tchelidze, 1996, pp. 545-555).

Amid Greek criticisms, Ephrem continued to refine his translation principles, aligning them more closely with the Greek original. The emphasis shifted towards the text itself and the accuracy of translation, as demonstrated by terminological, syntactic, and grammatical alignment with the Greek source. Passive constructions became more prevalent in the Georgian translation, replacing the active verb forms previously used. Nonetheless, unlike the Gelati school, Ephrem's translations do not display an ultra-Hellenophilic tendency (Jugheli, 2011, p. 355).

The homily examined in this study is a key example of Ephrem's intermediate stage in translation activity, which makes it particularly significant. The following examples are grouped thematically on the basis of intertextual comparison. The review of these examples will further substantiate the aims and conclusions of this study.

4. Comparison and Discussion of the Georgian Translation by Ephrem with its Greek Original

4.1. Additions

This section of the paper explores the additions in the Georgian translation of Ephrem Mtsire, focusing on how specific interpretative insertions demonstrate his early translation technique.

Ephrem Mtsire occasionally translates certain lines or small text segments not literally, but with slight modifications in syntax and interpretation, which he refers to as explicative translation „siṭquadartvit“ (with additions). With this approach, Ephrem's methodology aligns more closely with that of the Athonite Fathers rather than the Hellenophilic tendencies seen in his translations from the 1090s onwards. In his notes and annotations from the second phase of his translation work, Ephrem explicitly states that he does not expand the text and, when necessary, adds explanatory insertions or comments not within the main text but in the margins. Ephrem maintains that every translation requires some additions – explicitations – to clarify its meaning. However, he prefers a straightforward translation, avoiding additions or excessive intervention. If a few words need to be inserted to convey the meaning better, he does not integrate them directly into the text but records them in the margins or includes them in a preface (Rapava, 1976, p. 67). In Pseudo-Athanasius's homily, we find similar semantically clarifying “jalisa ganmachadebeli” [semantically clarifying] additions; however, these are present in the text itself, not in the margins, indicating that Ephrem considered the reader's interest and aimed for maximum clarity in translation. Ephrem probably refined his translation approach, placing such insertions in the margins or prefaces when translating more complex texts (Tvaltvadze, 2009, p. 24).

In the homily title, it is clear that Ephrem favours a dynamic-equivalent translation over a formal-equivalent one. Generally, the unit of translation is not an individual word or phrase but a larger segment – such as a sentence or a small semantic unit.

1. Τοῦ ἐν Ἀγίοις Πατρὸς ἡμῶν Ἀθανασίου εἰς Ἀπογραφὴν τῆς Ἀγίας Μαρίας, καὶ εἰς τὸν Ἰωσήφ, Λόγος (PG 28, 944). (*saḳithavi tkūmulī čmidisa da neṭarisa mamisa čūenisa Atanase Aleksandriel mtavarepiskoposisay. Siṭqūay aḡčērisatvis qovladčmidisa kalčulisa da ḡmrtismšobelisa Mariamisa da Iosebistws, romelman miūthova igi* (S 1276, 64r)¹[Homily Delivered by Our Father, Saint Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria. on the Census Involving the Most Holy Virgin Mary, Mother of God, and Joseph, Her Betrothed]).

2. Ὡς γὰρ πρὸς τὴν δύναμιν τοῦ γεννηθέντος Δεσπότης μικρὰ καὶ σφόδρα μικρὰ τὰ παραναγνωσθέντα, σπάργανα, καὶ φάτνη, καὶ τόπος ἀνεπιτήδειος (944 B 41-44). (*rametu amas čuēnca viṭqwit, vitarmed šemsgavsebulad jalisa šobilisa amis meupisa mcire arian, da priadca mcire aḡmokithulni ese siṭqūani. da uproysḡa mattwis, romelta garečarad aḡmoekithnen saḥūevelni da bagay da uḡonoebay savanisay da arakonebay adgilisay* [64r]) [For we too say this: that, in comparison with the power of the Begotten Lord, the words that have been read are small, and very small indeed. And even more so for those to whom the swaddling clothes, the manger, the inadequacy of the shelter, and the lack of any proper place were read unworthily]).

3. Καὶ ταῦτα μὲν μικρὰ, τὰ δὲ προκείμενα μυστικά· γαστήρ ἀνερμήνευτος, κόλπος ἀκατάληπτος,² μαζὸς ἀγιόριζος, γάλα ξενοόρρυες, θηλὴ τῆς φυσικῆς νομῆς ἄλλοτρία, ἡ Μήτηρ τοῦ Κυρίου ἐναπόγραφος γενομένη, ὁ μνηστήρ Ἰωσήφ ὀνόματος, καὶ οὐ πράγματος κοινωνίαν ἀσπαζόμενος (944 B 43 – 945 A 4). (*garna daḡacatu ese qovelni mcire arian, aramed priad didebul ars mat mīer aḡsrulebuli igi saidumloy, gamoukūlevelobay čiaḡta kalčulisatay da šeuhebelobay juḡuta dauklebelad mačovnebelisatay, ucho naḡadulobay igi šjisay da dedakaci zešta kmnuli šjulta bunebisay, aḡčērilta tana šerachvay ḡmrtisa dedisay da mimthoelad misisa*

¹ Already in the title, Ephrem provides the reader with detailed information regarding both the authorship and the content of the homily. As noted, the lack of a critical edition of the Greek original often makes it difficult to make definitive statements about the method of translation. For example, one version of the Greek title is: τῆς ὑπεραγίας γεννήσεως τοῦ Κυρίου καὶ Θεοῦ καὶ Σωτῆρος ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ (PG, vol. 28, 944). While this version does not correspond to the Georgian translation, it is possible that the manuscript used by Ephrem – now lost – contained a different version of the text.

² It is likely that Ephrem combines the two introductory expressions into one, or that the Greek manuscript he had before his eyes presented a different reading in this particular passage.

codebay ioseb martlisay aratu ziarebita sakmisayta, aramed čemebita holo sahelisayta [64v] [And though all these are small, the mystery they reveal is truly great: the womb of the Virgin is incomprehensible, the bosom beyond understanding, the breast sacred, the milk flowing unnaturally, the nipple foreign to the laws of nature, the Mother of the Lord registered as part of the census, and Joseph the Righteous, the Betrothed, was called her husband – not as one who shared in the act, but only in name].

As these examples show – and they represent only a small part of the additions in the homily – Ephrem's rendering of specific sentences is not verbatim, as might be expected in a Hellenophilic translation. Instead, he employs a “sense rendering” method with minor additions.¹ Comparing the Georgian translation of Pseudo-Athanasius' homily with the Greek original shows that Ephrem's additions are more common in passages where the context is ambiguous and needs clarification or simplification.

4.2. Omissions

There are instances where several phrases, syntagms, or words are left untranslated. While the omission of any part of the text contradicts Ephrem's translation principles: “I have not left a single word untranslated, neither by choice nor by necessity” (Tvaltvadze, 2009, pp. 128-129), such cases of omission may be explained by the specific features of the manuscript he had available. For this reason, the untranslated lexical units identified by comparison are presented below. Compared to additions, such cases are quite rare.

Although Ephrem frequently insists that it is unacceptable to leave any passage or word untranslated in the course of translating a work, his translations nonetheless include passages rendered with a freer approach, where specific segments or phrases are either omitted or translated only in their general sense rather than verbatim. Ephrem himself refers to this translation strategy as “omission-addition” (*kleba-mateba*) when discussing the translation practices of Euthymius the Athonite (Otkhmezuri, 2011, pp. 35-36).

In the case of Pseudo-Athanasius' homily, complex terminology or syntactic constructions are not common. As a result, Ephrem does not need to imply a special translation technique or to adapt the translation to a great extent,² and thus the instances of omission are limited to the exclusion or modification of certain lexical units or phrases.

4. καὶ οὐ κατόπιν ὁδεύουσι, μὴ πρότερον τὸν τόπον ἀμείβοντες, ἕως οὗ τὸν φωλεὸν τοῦ προκειμένου καταλάβωσι (944 A 27-30) ([*da arca erti ray acüenian dacadebay srbisay, arca tavs-idvian shuad cvalebay adgilisay, vidremdis šemjlebel ikmnia mimthüevad saunjeta, činaše matsa mdebareta [64r]*][*They do not display any hastiness in running, nor do they rashly rush to change their place, until they are able to attain the treasure that lies before them*]).

5. Ὡσπερ γὰρ ἐν οὐρανῷ μία ἡ τοῦ Θεοῦ βασιλεία κρατεῖ, καὶ πάντες οἱ ἄγγελοι τῷ θελήματι αὐτοῦ ὑποτάσσονται, τῶν δαιμόνων δίκην βαρβάρων ἀφηνιασάντων (948 B 24-26). ([*rametu vitarca-igi zecas erti oden ipqrobs mtavrobasa mravaltasa, vinaintgan učino kmnil ars matgan mjlavrebay ešmaktay, amitve sahitā ikmna küeqanasaca zeda [66r]*][*As in heaven one reigns over the dominions of many, and the power of the demons has been overcome by them, so likewise was this fulfilled on earth*]).

Instead of a direct translation of the entire clause πάντες οἱ ἄγγελοι τῷ θελήματι αὐτοῦ ὑποτάσσονται as *every angel obeys His (God's) will* (i.e., literal rendering), Ephrem renders the meaning with a single word – “*mravaltasa*” [*of many*] – as in the phrase: “*one reigns over the dominions of many*.”

¹ Other researchers have pointed this out as well, see: Raphava, 1976, p. 45; Jugheli, 2011, p. 356; Otkhmezuri, 2011, pp. 35-38.

² As is well known, before translating each work, Ephrem engaged in extensive philological research and selected his translation method according to the specific features of the text. For instance, in translating the commentaries of Basil the Minim, he would often omit certain passages or render them only in terms of their content (Otkhmezuri, 2011, pp. 36-39)).

As mentioned, the few examples listed above involve leaving a single word, short phrase or small sentence untranslated. However, there are other instances in the translation where entire sentences are either omitted or only a small, altered portion of their meaning is conveyed.

For example, the following whole sentence was not translated by Ephrem:

οὐ σὺ εἴ Μαριὰμ, ἡ τὴν βιασθεῖσαν Θάμαρ ἀναλεγομένη, καὶ τὸν ἄτακτον Ἄμνον βδελυττομένη; (952 B 27-29)¹ (*Is it not you, Mariam, who read about the violence done to Thamar and abhorred the lawless Amnon?*)

4.3. Hendiadys (ἐν διὰ δυοῖν)

There are instances in the translation where a single Greek word is rendered using two synonymous words. This method highlights several, subtly different, synonymous meanings of the Greek word. The following examples are provided as illustrations:

6. “τόπος ἀνεπιτήδειος” (*uğonoebay savanisay da arakonebay adgilisay* [the inadequacy of the shelter, and the lack of any proper place]). As we can see, this is a case of double hendiadys. On the one hand, „τόπος“ is transposed as “savanisay” and “adgilisay,” and on the other hand, “ἀνεπιτήδειος” is translated as “uğonoebay” and “arakonebay.” The latter highlights two aspects: 1. that the Mother of God lacked a suitable place for childbirth (*arakonebay*), and 2. that the place where she ultimately gave birth was inappropriate for Christ (*uğonoebay*).

7. “Ὁ λύων ἐδέδετο” – (*šeiñüvis da šeikrvis mñsneli* [He who saves all was wrapped and bound]). The verb „ἄλω“ is defined in the Greek–Georgian documented lexicon as: to bind, to wrap, to tie. Through this hendiadys, the idea is intensified.

8. “Αὕτη γὰρ ἡ ἀπογραφὴ τῆς οἰκουμενικῆς εὐταξίας ἀρράβων γέγνηται” (*rametu ese ağçeray ekmna qovelsa sopelsa mizez çesierebisa da çind gançesebulebisa* [For this census became, for the whole world, a cause of order and a sign of harmony]). This sentence also exhibits double hendiadys. The word “εὐταξίας” corresponds to both “çesierebisa” and “gançesebulebisa”, while “ἀρράβων” is rendered as both “mizez” and “çind.”

4.4. Participial Constructions

The frequent use of participles is a natural feature of the Greek, whereas it is not the case for Georgian, which typically favors finite verb forms. A distinctive characteristic of the Georgian translation of the homily is the consistent replacement of participial constructions with finite verbs. Several examples are provided below:

9. “μετὰ χειρὰς ἔχοντες” (944 A 32). (*helta šina çüenta ġwpqries* [64r] [We are holding it in our hands]).

10. “Τὸν Κύριον κρατήσαντες, καὶ θανάτῳ παραδοῦναι σπεύδοντες” (948 48-50) (*dağacatu šeipqres upali da çadier iqvnes sikudid micemasa missa* [66v] [And even if they seized the Lord, they were willing to hand Him over to death]).

¹ Latin translation: “Nonne tu es, o Maria, quae vi stupratam Thamar saepe legebas, et impudicum Amnonem exsecrabare?” (951 B 27–29). This passage refers to Thamar (Θαμάρ), the virgin daughter of King David and sister of Abessalom, who was raped by her half-brother Amnon. According to the biblical account: “And Thamar took ashes, and put them on her head; and she rent the variegated garment that was upon her: and she laid her hands on her head, and went crying continually” (2 Kings 13, 19). Eventually, Abessalom killed Amnon and was forced to flee Jerusalem. In the Latin translation of the homily, however, there is a reference to Genesis chapter 38, 6-26. Yet this chapter concerns a different Thamar (Θάμαρ) – the wife of Er, Judah’s son – who, after Er’s death, secretly conceived a child by Judah. Therefore, the Latin citation is inaccurate. The context of the homily, which also mentions Amnon, clearly points to the Thamar, Abessalom’s sister.

In the Greek original of the homily, participial constructions are rarely found without being rendered by Ephrem with a personal (finite) verb form. The substitution of a linguistic trait typical of Greek with forms more characteristic of the Georgian language – specifically, the consistent replacement of participles with personal verb forms – is, as previously noted, a hallmark of Ephrem Mtsire's earlier, pre-Hellenophilic phase of translation work. This particular feature, identified in the Georgian translation of the homily attributed to Athanasius, further supports the view that Ephrem completed the translation before the 1090s, before ultimately establishing the translation principles mentioned earlier.

4.5. Softening of Contextual or Lexical Intensity

Numerous instances of contextual softening are observed in the translations of Ephrem Mtsire. For example, in Theodoret of Cyrrhus' *Historia Philothea*, three episodes describe the physical uncleanness of ascetics who practised the rule of not washing. Ephrem translates only one of these three cases, omitting the other two. Similarly, while Theodoret states that Symeon the Elder was filthy, Ephrem softens this portrayal and describes him merely as "*ḱaci ganḥmeli da šesulebuli*" (*A thin and smelly man*) (Jugheli, 2011, p. 362).

In a passage from the homily of Pseudo-Athanasius, which recounts the Gospel narrative of Christ's arrest and presentation before Pontius Pilate's tribunal, the hatred, anger, and violence of the Jews against the Saviour are clearly emphasised. In this context, the author does not hesitate to use strong language to describe their actions and intentions. He writes that the Jews wished to "cut His body to pieces" and, when they cried out to Pilate: "Take Him, take Him, and crucify Him!" (John 19,15), Pseudo-Athanasius states that they were "barking like dogs". In both passages, Ephrem avoids literal rendering and softens the intensity of the expressions. Firstly, he states that the Jews "desired to put Him to death, just as they had formerly stoned the prophets", and secondly, he writes "He saw how the Jews spoke with one voice".

4.6. Biblical Citations

Since Pseudo-Athanasius' homily is exegetical and interprets the Gospel of Luke, it contains numerous references to Holy Scriptures. These include both thematic passages from the Gospel of Luke itself and episodes from the Old and New Testaments.

Ephrem Mtsire's method of translating citations of Holy Scriptures is well known. He was familiar with the Georgian translations of the Scriptures available at that time. His commentary on John of Damascus's *Expositio fidei* shows that he employs two different approaches when citing Holy Scriptures: 1. If a citation from the Greek source is used without modification, Ephrem does not re-translate it but employs the existing Georgian translation of the Scriptures (Jugheli, 2011, p. 386). 2. If the Greek citation includes in-text modifications and the author's insertions, Ephrem follows the author's version and re-translates the referenced passage (Bezarashvili, 2004, p. 516). Regarding citations from the Prophets in the *Expositio fidei*, he states: "I did not translate the words of the prophets differently out of ignorance, but I translated them as they were written in the original text" (Miminoshvili, 1966, p. 123).

In Pseudo-Athanasius' homily, Ephrem's translation of the Holy Scriptures employs two methods: firstly, the existing Georgian translation, which stylistically differs from the rest of the narration and aligns with the translation of George the Athonite, also matching the Greek source and Greek critical edition of the Gospel; secondly, citations from Greek sources sometimes include the author's interpretation, resembling oral citations, which do not correspond to the Georgian translation or the Greek critical editions.

a) Ephrem uses the already existing Georgian translation of Scripture

11. Ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις ἐκείναις ἐξῆλθε δόγμα παρὰ Καίσαρος Αὐγούστου, ἀπογράφεσθαι πᾶσαν τὴν οἰκουμένην. Αὕτη ἡ ἀπογραφή πρώτη ἐγένετο, ἡγεμονεύοντος τῆς Συρίας Κυρηνίου. Καὶ ἐπορεύοντο πάντες ἀπογράφεσθαι, ἕκαστος εἰς τὴν ἑαυτοῦ πόλιν. Ἐπορεύθη δὲ καὶ Ἰωσήφ ἐκ τῆς Γαλιλαίας ἐκ πόλεως Ναζαρεθ, εἰς τὴν Ἰουδαίαν, εἰς πόλιν Δαβὶδ, ἣτις καλεῖται Βηθλεὲμ, διὰ τὸ εἶναι αὐτὸν ἐξ οἴκου καὶ πατριᾶς Δαβὶδ, ἀπογράφεσθαι σὺν Μαριὰμ τῇ μεμνηστευμένη αὐτῷ γυναικί, οὕσῃ ἐγκύῳ (945 A 5-15) (Aland & Karavidopoulos, 2012). (*mat dgeta šina gamoḥda brjanebay agwstos ķeisrisagan aḡcerad qovlisa soplisa. ese aḡceray pirveli iqo mtavrobasa asurets ķwrinesa. da čarvidodes qovelni aḡcerad, titoeuli – twssa kalaksa. aḡvida iosebca galileayt, kalakit nazaretit huriastanad, kalakad davitisa, romelsa ecodebis betlem, rametu iqo igi sahlisagan da řomisa davitisa, aḡcerad mariamis tana, romeli thovil iqo missa da iqo igi midgomil* [65r] (Imnaishvili, 1979); [In those days, a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration, when Quirinius was governor of Syria. And all went to be registered, each to his own town. Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he belonged to the house and lineage of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was betrothed, who was with child (Luke 2, 1-5)].

12. Ἐγένετο ἐν τῷ εἶναι αὐτοὺς ἐκεῖ, ἐπλήσθησαν αἱ ἡμέραι τοῦ τεκεῖν αὐτὴν τὸν υἱὸν αὐτῆς τὸν πρωτότοκον· καὶ ἐσπαργάνωσεν αὐτὸν, καὶ ἀνέκλινεν αὐτὸν ἐν τῇ φάτνῃ, ὅτι οὐκ ἦν αὐτοῖς τόπος ἐν τῷ καταλύματι (956 A 3-6). (*da iqo, vidre iqvnesḡa igini mun, aḡivsnes dḡeni igi řobisa misisani da řva řēy igi misi pirmřoy da řehwa igi saḡüevlita da miačvina igi bagasa, rametu ara iqo matda adgil savanesa mas* [68v] [While they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn (Luke 2, 6-7)].

b) Ephrem himself translates the freely rendered citation of Scripture

13. Ὡφθη δὲ ἄγγελος Κυρίου κατ' ὄναρ τῷ Ἰωσήφ, λέγων· Ἰωσήφ υἱὸς Δαβὶδ, μὴ φοβηθῆς παραλαβεῖν Μαριὰμ τὴν γυναῖκά σου· τὸ γὰρ ἐν αὐτῇ γεννηθὲν, ἐκ Πνεύματος ἑστίν ἁγίου. Ἀναστὰς δὲ, φησὶν, Ἰωσήφ, παρέλαβε Μαριὰμ τὴν γυναῖκα αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἐπορεύθησαν εἰς Αἴγυπτον· καὶ οὐκ ἐγίνωσκεν αὐτὴν, ἕως οὗ ἔτεκε τὸν υἱὸν αὐτῆς τὸν πρωτότοκον (956 D 45-52) (*řeičqnara ioseb čuwnebay angelozisay, rametu ečüwena mas angelozī ḡmrtisay čüenebit da hrküa: nu geřinin miqvanebad mariamisa colisa řenisa, rametu romeli-igi misgan išves, sulisagan čmidisa ars. řolo igi aḡdga da čariqvana mariam coli tvisi da ara icoda igi, vidremde řva ře igi misi pirmřoy* [70r]; [Joseph accepted the revelation of the angel, for an angel of God had appeared to him in a vision and said: Do not be afraid to take Mary, your wife, for that which is born of her is from the Holy Spirit. Then he arose and took Mary, his wife, and did not know her until she had given birth to her firstborn son (cf. Matthew 1, 20-25)].

4.7. Transferring the Rhetorical Devices of the Greek Original into the Georgian

Translation

The Greek original of the homily possesses a remarkable rhetorical structure. Gregory the Theologian observes that its expressive and stylistic devices are woven together like purple in fabric. The narration within the text is lively and accessible to the reader, yet simultaneously rich in profound historical and exegetical passages. Simplicity and poetic language are harmoniously combined, providing the listener or reader with both an exegetical explanation of the Gospel and an aesthetic experience. The text is abundant in epithets, similes, and rhetorical questions that ensure full engagement from the audience during the delivery

of the homily (for example, stable, refrain-like repetitions of phrases, antitheses, hendiadyses, etc.). Ephrem Mtsire endeavours to preserve these stylistic qualities of the Greek language in the Georgian translation, and for the most part, he succeeds. However, in many cases, it is not always easy to convey both the exact expressive forms of the Greek language and the artistic features of the original.

There are many instances where Ephrem employs imitative translation to preserve the Greek original's rhetorical structure. For instance, in his translations of Basil the Minimus's commentaries – where elevated language is achieved through the use of comparative and superlative forms of adjectives and adverbs, frequent compound structures, and complex syntax – Ephrem successfully makes a verbatim translation while maintaining the original's rhetorical style through his skill as a translator (Otkhmezuri, 2011: 30-35). A similar method is used in translating Pseudo-Athanasius's homily: its rhetorical tone is preserved alongside an accurate translation of the text.

Pseudo-Athanasius often uses antithetical pairs, contrasting, for example, the wickedness of the Jews with the simplicity and love of Christ, or Christ's heavenly glory with his humiliation through incarnation. In such passages of the Greek original, logical connectives are frequently omitted – a common stylistic device in Greek – which enhances the rhetorical effect. In these cases, Ephrem sometimes omits the connective even when it appears in Greek. At other times, he supplies it where it is absent in Greek (these instances are more common in the translation than in the original).¹ Occasionally he renders the construction verbatim to preserve the rhetorical effect of the narrative.

Several phrases in the Greek original are repeated multiple times, emphasising one of the central messages of the text and leaving a strong impression on the audience. This particular phrase is especially notable for its inherent rhythm and alliteration. In the Georgian translation, the stylistic effect of the original is largely preserved, and most importantly, as in the Greek, the phrase is repeated in all three instances in the same form.

Εἰ γὰρ καὶ μικρὰ ἐν προοιμίῳ τὰ ῥήματα, ἀλλ' ὅμως μεγάλα τῆς χαρᾶς τὰ μυσταγωγήματα ([944 A 37-39, 945 A 15-17, 956 A 7-8] *rametu dağacatu mcire arian šesavalni sitqwsani, garna egretca didve arian madlni saharulovanni amis saidumloysani* [64r, 64v, 69v; *For even if the words in the preface are small, the mysteries of joy they convey are nevertheless great*].

Such paronomastic word combinations lend a distinctive rhetorical color to the Greek original, which Ephrem likewise skillfully renders in his translation.

“Τί... ἀκρασίᾳ κρατοῦντες τὸν δίκαιον, καὶ τὸν ἀνεύθυνον ὑπεύθυνον εἶναι θέλοντες” (949 A 12-13) *raysa ućesobit šeipqrobt martalsa da amaoebit braleul-hqopt ubralosa*[67r] [*Why do you seize the righteous in lawlessness, and by vanity brand the blameless as blameworthy?*].

5. Conclusion

The examples outlined above—including additions, omissions, hendiadyses, substitution of participial forms, shifts in grammatical number, and other phenomena—allow us to draw specific conclusions about Ephrem Mtsire's early translation activity. These cases clearly highlight Ephrem's translation approach peculiarities, revealing a dynamic interplay between two textual levels: fidelity to the Greek original and adaptation to the Georgian literary tradition.

As demonstrated, the translation corresponds with Ephrem's pre-Hellenophilic translation technique, dating before the 1090s. The text exhibits numerous instances of addition, contextual softening, interpretation, replacement of Greek participial forms with more natural finite verb forms in Georgian, and

¹ Similar cases are attested in Ephrem Mtsire's translation of Basil the Minimus as well; cf. Otkhmezuri, 2011, p. 33.

shifts in grammatical number. It also features Ephrem's characteristic use of highly artistic hendiadic expressions. Notably, in this homily, Ephrem employs the same method for biblical quotations as in his other translations: he uses existing Georgian translations—most notably that of George the Athonite—when the Greek text cites Scripture verbatim, but provides his own translations when the biblical passages in the Greek source are cited in a modified or paraphrased manner. The final part of the article presents several cases where rhetorical figures from the Greek original are successfully rendered in Georgian. The translator skillfully perceives and conveys the artistic and rhetorical nuances of the source text, a trait typical of Ephrem Mtsire's work.

Accordingly, the Georgian translation—considering its date, the origin of its earliest manuscript, and its stylistic features—clearly belongs to the first phase of Ephrem's translation activity. However, it should be noted that the critical edition of the Greek text of this homily, attributed to Pseudo-Athanasius, has not yet been published, and the text from the *Patrologia Graeca* was used for comparison in this study, which provides only minimal critical apparatus. Therefore, conclusions about Ephrem's translation method cannot be considered definitive. It is possible that the translator had access to a Greek manuscript that no longer exists. Additionally, the homily attributed to Pseudo-Athanasius is not a theologically or philosophically complex text rich in dogmatic terminology. Instead, it was intended as a liturgical reading before the Feast of the Nativity, which may explain Ephrem's relatively free approach and the methodology applied throughout this paper.

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