

**The Pseudepigraphal Prophecies on the Virginal Birth:
From the Slavonic, Greek, and Georgian to the Second Temple Jewish Background¹**

1. Introduction

The prophecy of Isaiah 7:14 “Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel” (KJV), even though perfect in its Greek form, has not always been considered as sufficient for proving to the Jews that the virginal birth of Christ was predicted in the Hebrew Bible. Some “additional” prophecies were quoted, too. Slavonic sources are necessary for tracing their literary tradition. We will trace it backwards, from the later to the earlier.

A series of prophecies on the virginal birth of Christ is known from some rare recensions of the *Passio Stephani* and the Slavonic *Words of Holy Prophets*. Whereas this topic is certainly interesting for studying the “afterlife” of the early Christian pseudepigrapha in the Slavic cultures, my main goal will be the very origin of these apocrypha.

It is another and also interesting story the “afterlife” of the pseudepigrapha in the Middle Byzantine period. For the Middle Byzantine texts, the Slavonic versions could become more secure vehicles of the texts than the manuscript tradition in Greek. Some Middle Byzantine text are available in Slavonic, whereas either lost or preserved in a worse condition in Greek. This is the situation in our case, or, at least, it seems to be so—until not all known Greek manuscripts of the relevant recensions of the *Passio Stephani* are published.

However, my present study will be focused on the very problem of the origin of the pseudepigraphic prophecies on the virginal birth. We will need Slavonic for reaching the Second Temple Jewish theologies.

2. The Prophecy of Solomon (The Words of the Holy Prophets)

Our latest source is preserved in Slavonic only, whereas is translated from Greek. This is the so-called *Words of the Holy Prophets*, which its recent editors Eugeny Vodolazkin and Tatiana Rudi preferred to call *The Prophecy of Solomon*. The editors consider the work to be an original Russian composition, whereas I consider it to be a South Slavic translation of a Greek Byzantine text composed shortly after 1229²; the text is preserved in five manuscripts, one of the two best ones being Serbian, the four others Russian. The question of origin of the whole work is not especially relevant to

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² First published in 2003, the latest edition within (Водолазкин 2008: 293-311, 389-467), introduction and edition respectively. C. Lourié 2009. Evgeny Vodolazkin still disagrees with my argumentation (personal communication) but did not published counter-arguments.

us presently, because, be this as it may, our prophecy has been translated from Greek—sometime and somewhere.

It is ascribed to the prophet Nathan and runs as following³:

Нафанъ пророкъ въ царство Давыдово сице прорече о Христѣ, яко родитися ему от Дѣвы: Видѣхъ, — рече, — Дѣвицу, держашу младенецъ без посяга мужеска.	Nathan the prophet in the reign of David prophesied about Christ that he has to be born from the Virgin, as follows: 'I saw, he said, a Virgin holding an infant, without getting married by a man.
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Some *Book of Nathan the Prophet* is mentioned in 1 Chr 29:29 and 2 Chr 9:29, but so far nothing is known about this or any other book attributed to Nathan.

The direct source of this quotation has been pointed out by Semën Osipovich Dolgov in 1911 (published in 1916): the *Passio Stephani BHG* 1649d, where our quotation is present in a more complete form⁴. This fact authorises us to leave the *Words of the Holy Prophets* behind us for focusing ourselves on the *Passio Stephani*.

3. *Passio Stephani BHG* 1649d (Greek and Slavonic) and 1649h (Greek)

Here we meet another peculiarity of the Slavic tradition: the *Passio Stephani*, which is, of course, a very popular text known in dozens of recensions in all languages of the Christian world (12 recensions only in Greek: *BHG* 1649 to 1649x)⁵, is especially popular in a rare recension *BHG* 1649d⁶, which preserves pseudepigraphic prophecies put into the mouth of Stephan before his lapidating.

The *Passio Stephani* goes back to very early Christian sources saturated with a number of “apocryphal” traditions, interwoven with the hagiographical dossier of Pontius Pilates as a Christian saint. The presently available dozens of recensions seem to have a common ancestor. This earliest but lost recension has been shaped by John II, Patriarch of Jerusalem, at the time of the discovering of the relics of Stephanus and those with him (Gamaliel, Nicodemus, and Abib) in 415. John II was deeply rooted in the Palestinian Jewish-Christian milieu, and no wonder that his “standardised” recension of the *Passio Stephani* turned out to smell extremely “apocryphal” for the later generations⁷.

Michel van Esbroeck thought, whereas without affirming it explicitly, that the Georgian version of the *Passio Stephani* available to us must be very close to the recension composed by John of Jerusalem (van Esbroeck 1984: 101-107). An examination of some Greek and Slavonic recensions would suggest that the reality is somewhat more complicated: both Georgian and Greek/Slavonic recensions preserve earlier parts, elsewhere missing, and both are going back to a common archetype.

The extant recensions present different ways and different stages of “purification” of the story from different “apocryphal” contents. For us, only the details of the second Stephan’s apologetic speech are of importance. Most often, this speech is either suppressed at all or severely shortened. It is survived, however, in two rare Greek recensions, *BHG* 1649d (5 mss) and *BHG* 1649h (2 mss)⁸, both published according to one manuscript only. However, the recension *BHG* 1649d is quite widespread

³ Водолазкин 2008: 405-406; cf. Lourié 2009: 383-384.

⁴ He made this observation in his publication of *BHG* 1649d and its Slavonic version (Долговъ 1916: 52-53).

⁵ For an outline of the whole hagiographical dossier, see Bovon 2003.

⁶ Published two times independently from *Scorial gr.* 314 (12th cent.): Долговъ 1916: 33-45 (with the Slavonic version *en regard*) and Strus 1996: 42-61; Strus knew Dolgov’s edition by reference but did not have access to it (Strus 1996: 22, fn. 9). Strus enumerated four Greek manuscripts dated to the 11th/12th centuries and the earliest fifth manuscript Sabbaiticus 18 (10th cent.) but all the unpublished manuscripts are not taken into account in his edition (Strus 1996: 22, fn. 9).

⁷ For the 415 situation in general, see (van Esbroeck 1984) and (Lourié 2019).

⁸ Edited by Andrzej Strus (Strus 1996: 21-41).

in its Slavonic version, which has been included, among others, in the *Great Menologion* by Metropolitan of Moscow Macarius. Its earliest Slavonic manuscript is a Russian one of the twelfth century⁹.

I will quote the Slavonic according to Dolgov's 1916 edition but with rare corrections from later manuscripts (made by Dolgov in his apparatus). The Slavonic version preserves the text of the recension better than the Greek manuscript—at least, the only manuscript that is so far published. In the part we are interested in, a very similar but somewhat different recension *BHG* 1649h is sometimes closer to the Slavonic and is also important for understanding our prophecies.

The florilegium of the *Passio* does not avoid, of course, Is 7:14 (here combined with 6:9: “For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given” KJV; cf. item II in Table 1) but adds something new (Table 1).

Table 1.

	<i>BHG</i> 1649d	Slavonic version of <i>BHG</i> 1649d (Dolgov)	<i>BHG</i> 1649h
I	λέγει γὰρ ὁ νόμος καὶ τὸ δευτερονόμιον ἐν τῇ παραλειπούσῃ βίβλῳ· Ὅταν ἔλθῃ ὁ χρόνος τῆς διαθήκης μου, ἀποστελῶ τὸν ἀγαπητόν μου ἄγγελον τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς υἰοθεσίας τῇ ἀμολύτῳ παρθένῳ καὶ βλαστήσει καρπὸν δικαιοσύνης ἐκτὸς ἀρότρου καὶ σποράς καὶ σπερμάτων καταβολῆς, καὶ αὐξεθήσεται ὁ καρπὸς ἐν αἰσθήσει [<i>corr Dolgov acc. Slav.; ms and Strus ἐσθήσει</i>] γλυκύματος εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα κατὰ τὸν [λόγον <i>erased but restored by Dolgov</i>] τῆς διαθήκης μου· καὶ ἔσται τὸ σημεῖον τοῦτο. Because the Law and the Deuteronomy in the remaining book says: When the time of my Covenant arrives, I will send my beloved angel, the Spirit of adoption-into-sonship, to an undefiled virgin, and she will bring forth a fruit of righteousness—without ‘plough’, and seed, and discharge of semen, and the fruit will grow up in perceiving of delight forever, according to the word of my Covenant. And this will be a sign.	Глеть бо въ законѣ пръвѣмъ· и въ вторѣмъ· въ вставъшихъ книгахъ· ꙗгда придетъ годъ завѣтоу поущоу възлюбленыи свои а҃нгль дѣхъ бѣсѣнства [*τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς τοῦ θεοῦ υἰοθεσίας – <i>Dolgov</i>] иицистыя дѣца плодъ правдыи· бесѣмене родивъшася· ни вбразѣ [<i>“nor image” instead of “nor ‘plough’” – B.L.</i>]· и въздрастеть плодъ по чювъствоу наслаждения во вѣкы· и в словеси завѣта моего· и боудеть знамение се· Because it is said in the first Law and in the second, in the remaining (παραλειπόμενα?) books: When the time/hour of the Covenant arrives, I will send my beloved angel, the Spirit of adoption-into-divine-sonship, the righteous fruit from a pure virgin that (will be) born without seed and image [<i>should be ‘plough’</i>] either. And the fruit will grow up in perceiving of delight forever and in the word of my Covenant. And this will be a sign.	λέγει γὰρ τὸ δευτερονόμιον ἐν τῇ δευτέρᾳ βίβλῳ· Ὅταν ἔλθῃ ὁ χρόνος τῆς διαθήκης μου, ἀποστελῶ τὸν ἄγγελον μου τὸν ἀγαπητόν· καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς υἰοθεσίας δι’ ὁδοῦ εὐθείας τῆς ἀμολύντου παρθένου, καὶ βλαστήσει καρπὸν δικαιοσύνης ἐκτὸς ἀρότρου καὶ σποράς· καὶ αὐξεθήσεται ὁ καρπὸς ἐν ἡδονῇ γλυκάσματος εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα κατὰ τὸν λόγον τῆς διαθήκης μου. Because the Deuteronomy in the second book says: When the time of my Covenant arrives, I will send my beloved angel, the Spirit of adoption-into-sonship, <i>via</i> the right way, to an undefiled virgin, and will bring forth a fruit of righteousness—without ‘plough’, and seed, and the fruit will grow up in perceiving of pleasure forever, according to the word of my Covenant.
II	Isaiah 9:6 + 7:14	Isaiah 9:6 + 7:14	Isaiah 9:6 + 7:14

⁹ Ed. by Dolgov (Dolgov 1916) together with the Greek text of *BHG* 1649d and with variant readings from two other Slavonic manuscripts. Dolgov has previously published the Slavonic text of the Macarius's *Great Menologion* manuscript in an issue of their multivolume edition he was responsible for: Долговъ 1912: cols. 2390–2400 (with notes on the Greek original of particular phrases).

III	<p>Καὶ προσεφώνει Νάθαν ὁ προφήτης· "Ἴδον τὴν παρθένον ἀπείραστον ἀνδρὸς καὶ τὸ βρέφος ἐν ταῖς χερσὶν αὐτῆς· καὶ ἐφωτίσθη τὸ καταχθόνιον, καὶ ὁ ἄηρ [ἄρχων <i>corr Dolgon</i>] τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου ἔφυγεν εἰς τὰς λαγῶνας τῆς γῆς.</p> <p>And addresses Nathan the prophet: I saw a virgin unexperienced with a man, and a child in her hands. And the (abode) under the earth was enlightened, and the prince of the present age fled to the distant parts of the earth.</p>	<p>и глаше нафанъ пр(о)ркъ· видѣхъ дѣвцу бес посага моужьска· и млaдeньцѣ въ роукоу си· и просвѣтъсѧ землѧ [*ἡ γῆ – <i>Dolgon</i>]· и владаи землею сею бѣже до послѣдка [*τὰ ἔσχατα – <i>B. L.</i>] земли·</p> <p>And Nathan the prophet said: I saw a virgin not married to a man, and a child in her hands. And the earth was enlightened, and that who possesses this earth fled to the ends of the earth.</p>	<p>Καὶ Νάθαν ὁ προφήτης λέγει· εἶδον τὴν παρθένον ἀπείραστον ἀνδρὸς καὶ τὸ βρέφος ἐν ταῖς ἀγκάλαις αὐτῆς· καὶ ἐφωτίσθη τὰ καταχθόνια· καὶ ὁ ἄρχων τοῦ κόσμου τούτου ἔφυγεν εἰς τὰ ἔσχατα τῆς γῆς.</p> <p>And Nathan the prophet says: I saw a virgin unexperienced with a man, and a child in her arms/bosom. And those under the earth were enlightened, and the prince of this world fled to the ends of the earth.</p>
IV	<p>Βαροὺχ ὁ προφήτης λέγει· Πέτρα φανήσεται ἀπὸ ὀρέων αἰωνίων καὶ πατάξει βδελύγματα τῆς ταπεινώσεως.</p> <p>Baruch the prophet says: A rock will appear from the eternal mountains and will smite the abominations of humiliation.</p>	<p>паки и вароухъ пророкъ глеть· камыкъ явиться ѿ горы вѣчныя [*ἀπὸ ὄρους αἰωνίου – <i>Dolgon</i>]· и поразить капища впоущения·</p> <p>And also Baruch the prophet says: A stone will appear from the eternal mountain and will smite the shrines of desolation.</p>	<p>καὶ Βαροὺχ ὁ προφήτης λέγει· Πέτρα φανήσεται ἀπὸ αἰωνίων ὀρέων καὶ πατάξει βδελύγματα τῆς ἐρημώσεως.</p> <p>And Baruch the prophet says: A rock will appear from the eternal mountains and will smite the abominations of desolation.</p>
V	Ps 131 (132 MT):8	Ps 131 (132 MT):8	Ps 131 (132 MT):8

The final, fifth part of this florilegium is one of the “Psalms of Degrees,” Ps 131 (132 MT):8: “Arise, O Lord, into thy rest; thou, and the ark of thy holiness” (τοῦ ἀγιάσματος σου instead of $\overline{\text{ἰσχύ}}$; therefore, not “of thy strength”). There is no mention of any “virgin” here. There is no mention of virgin in the fourth part either. One can wonder what meaning have such citations in a florilegium on the virginal birth?

In the fifth part, the answer is obvious: it is implied that “the ark of thy holiness” is the Theotokos. An analogous consideration is applicable to the fourth part: the stone that will smite the shrines where the abomination of desolation is established (a clear allusion to the defiled Jerusalem temple) is “the cornerstone in Zion”; we will see that this image is also leading to the Theotokos.

Let us consider the three “non-canonical” witnesses in a more detailed way.

4. The “Deuteronomic” Witness and Malachi

The source of the first *testimonium* is called differently in the three our witnesses. The third variant, that of *BHG* 1649h, seems to be resulting from a later attempt of polishing the text, but it is difficult to figure out the original title from the two others. I would propose that we are dealing with some “Rewritten Pentateuch” and/or other parabiblical source like those that we know now from the Dead Sea Scrolls.

It is striking that the text of the prophecy is depending on the famous prophecy of Malachi. However, it is not applied here to John the Baptist, as it became usual in Patristics and later liturgical traditions (Table 2).

Table 2.

<i>BHG 1649d-h</i>	Malachi 3:1
When the time of <u>my Covenant</u> arrives, <u>I will send my</u> beloved <u>angel</u> , the Spirit of adoption-into-sonship, <u>via the right way</u> , to an undefiled virgin, and will bring forth a fruit of righteousness—without ‘plough’, and seed, and the fruit will grow up in perceiving of <u>delight/pleasure</u> forever, according to the word of my Covenant.	Behold, <u>I will send my angel</u> (τὸν ἄγγελόν μου / מַלְאָכִי), and <u>he shall prepare the way</u> (ὁδὸν / הַדֶּרֶךְ) before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the angel <u>of the Covenant</u> , <u>whom ye delight in</u> (καὶ ὁ ἄγγελος τῆς διαθήκης ὃν ὑμεῖς θέλετε / תִּיִּבְרַךְ הַמְּשִׁיחַ מִיְיָ צְבָוֹת הַמְּשִׁיחַ): behold, he shall come, saith the Lord of hosts.

The “Angel Pneumatology” in this fragment is sufficient for assigning an earlier date, before the fourth century¹⁰. The most interesting is that our text does not follow the Greek text of Malachi in ὃν ὑμεῖς θέλετε but, instead, provide equivalents—different in *BHG* 1649d and h—to the Hebrew “whom ye delight in”: ἐν αἰσθήσει γλυκύματος or ἐν ἡδονῇ γλυκάσματος. The available Greek translations of Mal 3:1, not only the Septuagint, have here θέλετε and never a closer rendering of “to be delighted/pleased in”¹¹. Our text seems to be depending rather on the Hebrew Malachi than the Greek one.

It is especially remarkable that our prophecy is derived from the text of Malachi with substitution of “temple” by “virgin”. We will see that we are dealing with a tradition where the virgin that gives birth to the Messiah is the true temple of God and, more specifically, the true ark. (“True” in the sense of the reality that has been prefigured in the Old Testament temple and ark of Covenant).

These archaic features—namely, “Angel Pneumatology” and dependence on the Hebrew text of Malachi—require an appreciation of our florilegium as a very early source, even though not necessarily, as Andrzej Strus insisted (out of different reasons), of the first century AD¹².

5. The “Danielic” Baruch

We are skipping, for the time being, the next prophecy by Nathan to address that of Baruch. It is easily discernible that it is formed as a contamination of two Danielic prophecies (Table 3):

Table 3.

<i>BHG 1649d-h</i>	Daniel and Ps 75 (76)
And Baruch the prophet says: A rock (πέτρα) will appear from the eternal mountains (φανήσεται ἀπὸ ὀρέων αἰωνίων) and will smite (πατάξει) the abominations of desolation (βδελύγματα/βδέλυγμα τῆς ἐρημώσεως).	Dan 2:34 Thou sawest till that a stone (λίθος) was cut out without hands, which smote the image upon his feet that were of iron and clay, and brake them to pieces. Ps 75 (76):5 φωτίζεις σὺ θαυμαστῶς ἀπὸ ὀρέων αἰωνίων. Dan 2:35 <...> and the stone that smote (ὁ λίθος ὁ πατάξας) the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth. Dan 9:27, 11:31, 12:11 the abominations wrought by the desolator (βδέλυγμα τῆς ἐρημώσεως).

¹⁰ Cf. (Bucur 2009), with previous bibliography.

¹¹ Cf. (Ziegler 1943/1967: 335).

¹² Cf. (Strus 1995).

It is normal, for the various messianic and apocalyptic Second Temple Jewish traditions related to Baruch, to elaborate on the Book of Daniel. Therefore, our paraphrasing of Daniel in the mouth of Baruch is in order, even though we do not know this prophecy from any other source.

The prophecy of Baruch is composed using a very simple procedure: the dream of Nebuchadnezzar is interpreted as applying not to the Babylonian empire but to the defiled temple of Jerusalem, which has been mentioned by Daniel on other occasions. The Greek wording is mostly preserved but with a strange exception for the key term “stone”: אֶבֶן is not rendered with λίθος, which is normal for the Greek translations of the Bible¹³, but with πέτρα. This would suggest, for the *Sitz im Leben* of our prophecy, a milieu having access to the Book of Daniel in Hebrew, probably bilingual (Hebrew/Aramaic—Greek).

For πέτρα, we would expect rather צוּר or סלע “rock, cliff” as the exact equivalent in the Hebrew original (for instance, it is supposed that the name of the Nabatean capital Πέτρα is the translation of its Hebrew name סלע). We will meet this non-biblical Hebrew phrase below.

This impression is corroborated with the quotation from Ps 75 (76):5, where we have a different choice between Greek synonyms: φανήσεται instead of a form of φωτίζω. However, the same choice has been made by Symmachus (ἐπιφανῆς εἶ, with ἐπιφανήσει in a unique manuscript) and the Syriac translation: ܐܬܝܬܐ¹⁴.

Now we will leave our Baruch for the time being, but only to return to him at the final part of our study.

6. The Prophecies on the Virginal Birth with no Mention of Virgin

The two latest prophecies in our series, Baruch and Ps 131 (132 MT):8: “Arise, O Lord, into thy rest; thou, and the ark of thy holiness” (τοῦ ἀγιάσματος σου instead of ἰσχύ; therefore, not “of thy strength”), do not mention a virgin at all. The quotation of Ps 131 follows the Septuagint against all other Greek translations that follow the Hebrew text¹⁵.

One should wonder why these two witnesses are quoted at all. For many modern readers, they are simply irrelevant to the virginal birth. It was not so, however, in the early Christian traditions, where the messianic prophecies related to the temple (as our Baruch), Zion, and the ark of Covenant (as Ps 131) were read as relating to the Theotokos. Such an understanding becomes the Byzantine exegetical mainstream since Proclus of Constantinople in the 430s, but it has been certainly elaborated earlier. Proclus used it but did not invent it¹⁶.

However, the earlier history of these and other Marian traditions is obscure for the modern scholarship, and this is one of our reasons for studying our florilegium.

7. The Georgian Version

¹³ Cf. (Lust, Eynikel, Hauspie 2003/2016: s.vv. λίθος and πέτρα).

¹⁴ Cf. (Field 1875: vol. 2, 221). I do not quote the Göttingen Septuagint for the Psalms (Rahlfs 1931), because it, unlike later Göttingen volumes, still does not take into account other Greek and non-Greek versions.

¹⁵ Cf. (Field 1875: vol. 2, 288).

¹⁶ Cf., for an earlier background of Proclus of Constantinople's usage (among others, the implied meaning of Lk 1:43 as referring to 2 Kg 6:9, David's words related to the Ark), Nicholas Constatas's comment to Proclus's *Homily* 5.III, 79 (Constatas 2003: 272).

Now we have to introduce another and the earliest witness of the *Passio Stephani*, its Georgian version. The text is preserved in a number of manuscripts (Enrico Gabidzashvili enumerates six¹⁷), two of them are published; they are almost identical¹⁸. We will use the earliest manuscript, the *Sinai Polykephaleion* (სინური მრავალთავი) of dated, according to the colophon, to 864¹⁹.

This text has been translated into French by Michel van Esbroeck in 1984 (van Esbroeck 1984: 101-105), but inexactly in one important but difficult place (van Esbroeck 1984: 102). I propose a new translation of the florilegium part which I prepared with the help of five scholars, to whom I express my deep gratitude (Yakov Testelet, Nikoloz Nikolozishvili, Alexey Ostrovsky, Andrew Boroda, and Fr Pachomius from the Holy Transfiguration Monastery, Boston); they provided, moreover, a new reading of the manuscript, improving that of Akaki Shanidze in the part of punctuation, which is crucial for understanding.

From five parts preserved by our Greek and Slavonic recensions, the Georgian preserves only three, and they are somewhat different. The “Deuteronomic” quotation and that of Ps 131 are dropped out. We will see, nevertheless, that the “Deuteronomic” quotation did not disappear without trace (Table 4).

Table 4.

The Georgian <i>Passio</i>	Translation and Comments
Isaiah, რომელმან აღვლნა შუდნი ცანი (follows Is 7:14)	Isaiah is the one “who ascended the seven heavens” (said as introductory words to Is 7:14)
მერმე ნათან წინაწარმეტყუელმან თქუა, ვითარმედ: ქალწულისაგან შობილისა განიხაროს ყოველმან ჳორციელმან და სიტყუად უფლისად მას შინა დამტკიცნეს.	Then, Nathan the Prophet said so: All flesh will rejoice over the One ²⁰ who is born of a Virgin, and the word of the Lord will be established in Him.
და მერმე ესუ ძჳ ნევედსი იტყვს: ვიხილე დასაბამი იგი — ყრმად წიაღთა ქალწულისათა. და შჳული, რომელ თქუენ გაქუს, მისთჳს იტყვს ნაყოფი იგი, რომელ იშვა ქალწულისა მისგან: განეშოროს ისრაელი შჳულისაგან მისისა და ნათესავნი რომელ დაშთენ, დაემტკიცნენ იგინი.	And, then, Jesusz Son of Nun said: I saw the beginning (ἀρχή) — a Child in the bosom of a Virgin. And the Fruit that was born of a Virgin says about the Law that you have: “Israel will be separated from his Law, and the nations that remain will be established in it.”

8. An Apocalyptic Isaiah

Although Isaiah here says nothing more than his habitual prophecy on the virgin, he is introduced by the author of our florilegium as the one “who ascended the seven heavens,” that is, as the main character of the *Ascensio Isaiae*. This is hardly an addition made by the Georgian translator and must be considered as a feature of the original *Passio*. The Greek recension translated into Georgian has already lost its “Deuteronomic” part with its “Angelic Pneumatology,” but, at least, preserved an allusion to the *Ascensio Isaiae* as a scriptural authority. One can remark, by the way, that the *Ascension* was famous with its “Angelic Christology,” which became the main reason of its dropping out from the standard sets of recommended scriptures.

¹⁷ Under Nr 1062, სტეფანე პირველდიაკონისა და პირველმოწამის წამება “Martyrdom of the First-Deacon and First-Martyr Stephanus” (გაბიძაშვილი 2004: 337).

¹⁸ According to the evaluation by van Esbroeck 1984: 101.

¹⁹ Published by Akaki Shanidze (შანიძე 1959: 58-62) and ტაბ. (Plate) 6 for the photo of f. 56v containing the fragment we are interested in; cf., for the edition, (შანიძე 1959: 58).

²⁰ ქალწულისაგან შობილისა requires a subject; therefore, “the One” is added in the translation.

For us, it is an important witness opting for an earlier date for our florilegium.

9. The Georgian Nathan and the “Deuteronomic” Prophecy

It is easy to see that the prophecy of Nathan in the Greek and Slavonic recension has more to do with the prophecy of Joshua (Jesus) bar Nun in the Georgian. The Georgian Nathan, however, could remind to us our lost in Georgian “Deuteronomic” prophecy (Table 5).

Table 5.

The Georgian Nathan	The “Deuteronomic” Prophecy
All flesh will rejoice over (განობნარობს) [<i>the underlying Greek word has been, most likely, ἐμφραίνω</i> ²¹] the One who is born of a Virgin, and the word of the Lord will be established in Him.	<...> and the fruit [of the virgin] will grow up in perceiving of delight/pleasure forever, according to the word of my Covenant.

It seems that the Georgian Nathan paraphrases, in a very short way, our “Deuteronomic” prophecy—whereas the Georgian Joshua is partially overlapping with the Greek and Slavonic Nathan. Which of the two Nathans was the Nathan of the original recension?

We will see that there are reasons to take the attribution of the last Georgian prophecy to Joshua bar Nun as the genuine. In the same time, there are reasons to consider the first Greek and Slavonic prophecy that having been originally attributed to Nathan.

Nathan is authorised to appear in our florilegium because of his prophecy on the future building of the temple given to David and literally applied to his son Solomon, but containing clearly messianic parts that were inapplicable to the human descendants of David but dealing with a “son of God” in a literal sense and his eternal kingdom. It is also important to us that this prophecy is provided in the Bible twice, in 2 Sam 7 and 1 Chr 17. In both cases, the prophecy is about the temple, but we have already known that, in a certain logic, this means that they are about the Theotokos.

The relevant parts are the following (Table 6):

Table 6.

2 Sam 7	1 Chr 17
¹² When your days are over and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, your own flesh and blood, and I will establish his kingdom. ¹³ He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. ¹⁴ I will be his father, and he will be <u>my son</u> .	¹¹ And it shall come to pass, when thy days be expired that thou must go to be with thy fathers, that I will raise up thy seed after thee, which shall be of thy sons; and I will establish his kingdom. ¹² He shall build me a house, and I will stablish his throne for ever. ¹³ I will be his father, and he shall be <u>my son</u> ; and I will not take my mercy away from him, as I took it from him that was before thee: ¹⁴ But I will settle him in mine house and in my kingdom for ever: and his throne shall be established for evermore.

Now we are in position to realise why the source of the prophecy that is the first in the Greek and Slavonic lists has so strange title. Putting aside the title in *BHG* 1649h as hopelessly corrupted, let us consider the titles in *BHG* 1649d and its Slavonic version (Table 7):

Table 7.

<i>BHG</i> 1649d	Slavonic version of <i>BHG</i> 1649d
λέγει γὰρ ὁ νόμος καὶ τὸ δευτερονόμιον ἐν τῇ παραλειπούσῃ βίβλῳ	глаголю бо въ законѣ пръвѣмъ· и въ вѣторѣмъ· въ вставъшихъ книгахъ

²¹ Cf. (მელიქიძეილი 2010: vol. 2, 247).

Because the Law and the Deuteronomy in the remaining book says	Because it is said in the first Law and in the second, in the remaining (παρὰλειπόμενα?) books
--	--

I would suggest the following approximate reconstruction of these references, rather on the ground of the Slavonic version rather than the Greek recension quoted:

*Because it is said, first time in the Law and second time in the *Books of Paraleipomena* [= Chronicles]...

With the help of the Georgian version, we managed to establish a link between the “Deuteronomic” quotation and Nathan. But the prophecy of Nathan is appearing two times, one of them in the *Books of Paraleipomena*. The Slavonic words “first” and “second” used in Locative (with a repetition of the preposition “in” before “second”) should be morphologically erroneous renderings of the Greek words τὸ πρῶτον, τὸ δεύτερον in the meaning “first (time)..., second (time)...”

10. The Georgian Joshua and the Greek and Slavonic Nathan

The Greek and Slavonic Nathan retains the “main idea” of Joshua’s witness—that of the vision of a virgin with a child, —but omit all other elements, whereas adds some more quotations *ad libitum*. For a comparison, I will quote *BHG* 1649h, where the quotations added preserve better their original shape, whereas I do not insist that this recension is the best preserved in the relevant part (Table 8).

Table 8.

The Georgian Joshua	Nathan in <i>BHG</i> 1649h
I saw the beginning (ἀρχή) — a Child in the bosom of a Virgin. And the Fruit that was born of a Virgin says about the Law that you have: "Israel will be separated from his Law, and the nations that remain will be established in it."	I saw a virgin unexperienced with a man, and a child in her arms/bosom. And those under the earth were enlightened, and the prince of this world fled to the ends of the earth.

11. The Common Source with the Nathan Tradition in the *Testament of Solomon*

In the Greek and Slavonic Nathan, there is some “added” material that does not go back to the Greek original of the Georgian Joshua. For this “added” material, see Table 9.

Table 9.

Nathan in Greek and Slavonic	Sources
καὶ ἐφωτίσθη τὰ καταχθόνια (<i>BHG</i> 1649h) и просвѣтъца земля [*ῆ γῆ] καὶ ὁ ἄρχων τοῦ κόσμου τούτου ἐφυγεν εἰς τὰ ἔσχατα τῆς γῆς	καὶ ἐφώτιζον πᾶσαν τὴν γῆν (Dan 4:11 LXX, said about the tree that saw in the dream Nebuchadnezzar). καὶ ἀπήγαγεν εἰς τὰ ἔσχατα τῆς γῆς (<i>Testamentum Salomonis</i> , rec. D, 7:6, said about Samael who is ἄρχων ... τοῦ τῶν δαιμόνων ... συστήματος, 7:2 and 5).

The first quotation is from the Book of Daniel, which is quite natural in such context. One can mention that our text follow the reading proper to the so-called Old Greek, ἐφώτιζον, and neither Pseudo-Theodotion nor other translations nor the Masoretic Hebrew²².

The second allusion is quite important to our study. It is not a paraphrasing of John 12:31 (νῦν ὁ ἄρχων τοῦ κόσμου τούτου ἐκβληθήσεται ἔξω) but an exact quotation from the peculiar recension D of the *Testament of Solomon* preserved in the unique Athonite manuscript *Dionysiou* 132 (16th cent.). This

²² That is, our text alludes to Dan 4:11 as “The sun and the moon dwelled in it and illuminated the whole earth” instead of “...and it span to the ends of the whole earth”; R. Timothy McLay’s translation in (Pietersma, Wright 2007: 1004).

recension entitled *Περὶ τοῦ Σολομῶντος* (*About Solomon*) is, in fact, no testament at all and is a biography of Solomon retold in the third person (whereas the *Testament* is by definition a first-person narrative, as we see it in all other recensions, whereas there the normal first-person speech is sporadically switching to the third-person one). Recension D has been discovered and first published by Vasilij Mikhajlovich Istrin (Истринъ 1898); since then, the scholarly consensus shares Istrin's conviction that recension D, without being especially ancient in its present shape, contains the most ancient core of the *Testamentum Salomonis*, and, therefore, according to the presently established dating of the *Testament*, has as the *terminus ante quem* the late third century; nevertheless, the *Sondergut* of recension D is not easily datable²³.

Our prophecy of Nathan quoted from chapter 7, a scene peculiar to recension D. Some demon Samael (Σαμαήλ) is presented by another demon (7:2) and then by himself (7:5) as "the Prince of the demoniac collegium" (or "gathering", "flock" etc.). After a short conversation with Solomon, Samael "retired to the latest part of the earth". In our prophecy, however, a similar scene is put into an eschatological framework.

There is no mention of Nathan in chapter 7. However, Nathan has already appeared in chapter 1 as a leading figure, and this chapter equally belongs to the *Sondergut* of recension D. There, the story of Nathan's failed attempt to prevent David's sin with the following conviction and David's penitence, otherwise known from a very short and succinct summary forming most of chapter 17 "Nathan" in the *Vitae prophetarum*, is retold as a detailed and full-blooded story (McCown 1922: 88*-89*). McCown followed James who pointed out to him the parallel from the *Vitae prophetarum*, thinking that the latter is the source of this part of recension D (McCown 1922: 85, fn. 6). This supposition seems to me extremely unlikely, given the nature of the *Vitae prophetarum* as a kind of synaxarium and especially the brevity and summarising intonation of the Nathan chapter. It seems to me much more likely that recension D quotes the common source with the *Vitae prophetarum*; oddly enough, the question has never been addressed so far by the scholars of the *Vitae*²⁴.

Given that the parallel with recension D of the *Testament of Solomon* occurred, in our prophetic florilegium, within the prophecy attributed to Nathan, we are authorised to conclude that

1. the chapters 1 and 7 of recension D are quoting a common source related to Nathan, and
2. this common source is underlying our Nathan's prophecy.

12. Joshua bar Nun as a Prophet

The tradition considering Joshua as one of the prophets and, more exactly, the prophet like Moses (cf. Deut. 18:15), was quite widespread in different Israelite milieux. It is a more delicate problem, whether he has prophesied about the virginal birth of the Messiah. As we have seen, this problem has been resolved in the positive by the composer of our florilegium. We could expect that he has based his understanding on some words of Joshua concerning the future temple or the ark, but the real difficulty is that there are no such words attributed to Joshua in the mediaeval Christian or

²³ See (Истринъ 1898: 20-22, 27-28) and (McCown 1922: 32-36, 108), cf. (Duling 1983: 937). The standard edition of recension D is presently (McCown 1922: 88*-97*) but it does not differ substantially from that of Istrin (Истринъ 1898: 42-50). To my knowledge, no translation of recension D into a modern language is available. Montague Rhodes James considered equally plausible an alternative scenario, where D would have been resulted from an expansion of the original recension (James 1923).

²⁴ Even the most scrupulous among them, Anna Maria Schwemer, is not an exception (Schwemer 1996).

Jewish traditions. Without such words, however, any attribution of a witness to Joshua would be meaningless.

Fortunately, such words were found in Qumran, among the Dead Sea Scrolls, which contain a number of fragments attributed to Joshua as a prophet. One of them, 4Q522, fr. 9, col. ii, is a prophecy on Zion²⁵.

2 לוא ... [...] להשכין שם את אהל מן עד 3 העתים כי הנה בן נולד לישי בן פרץ בן יהודה 4 [...] את סלע ציון ... וירש משם את כל האמורי מי 5 [...] לבנות את הבית ליהוה אלוהי ישראל זהב וכסף 6 [...] ארזים וברושים יביא [...] לבנון לבנותו ובנו הקטן [...] 7 יכהן שם ראישון מן [...] חס [...] ואותו [...] צה 8 [...] [בכו] [ל] מן עון מן השמי [...] כי [ידיד יהוה] ישכון לבטח 9 [...]. ה[ימים] ו[עמו] ישכון לעד ועתה האמורי שם והכנעני 10 [...] יושב אשר החטיו אשר לוא דרשתי א[ת] מן שפט ה 11 [...] מאתכה והשלוני וה[נה] נתתיו עבד ע[ם] [...] רא[...] 12 ועתה נ[ש]כינה את א[הל] מן [ועד רחוק מן 13 [...]]. אלעזר [וישון] ע את א[הל] מן [עד מבית] אל 14 [...] ישוע [...] ש[ר] צבא מש[...] [...] [...] [...] 15	1 [...] ... [...] 2 not [...] ... to establish there the tent of me[eting ...] 3 of the times. For, behold, a son is born to Jesse, son of Perez, son of Ju[dah ...] 4 the Rock of Zion, and he will drive out from there /all/ the Amorites, from [...] 5 to build the house for yhw[h], God of Israel. Gold and silver [...] 6 he will bring cedar and cypress [from] Lebanon for its construction; but his son, the younger, [...] 7 he will officiate there first [...] ... [...] and to him [...] 8 [in al] the [re]sidence from the heaven[s, because] the beloved of yhw[h] will dwell in safety [...] 9 [the] days, [and] his people will dwell forever. But now, the Amorites (are) there, and the Canaan[ites ...] 10 dwellers who have made them sin, because I have not inquired [the jud]gment of [...] 11 from you. And the Shilonite, and be[ho]ld, I have made him the servant of the pe[ople of ...] 12 And now, let us establish the t[ent of mee]ting far from [...] 13 Eleazar [and Joshu]a the t[ent of me]eting from Bet [El ...] 14 Joshua [... ch]ief of the army ... [...]
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Looking from a remote past, Joshua prophesies about the establishment of the “tent of meeting” on the “Rock of Zion” in future—but forever. Before this, the pagan peoples that abode there presently should leave the place free. “Rock of Zion” (סלע ציון) is an unbiblical phrase but already familiar to us grace to our prophecy of Baruch, where we have no λίθος, as it would have been expected, but πέτρα. The idea underlying the crushing of the defiled temple in our Baruch’s prophecy and the present Qumranic idea of liberation of the Rock of Zion from its present pagan possessors are, in the prophetic perspective, coinciding: in both cases, the Jewish official religious authorities are meant.

Due to a peculiar wording of our prophecy of Baruch (πέτρα instead of λίθος), we can conclude that it was sharing the tradition on Joshua alluded to in our Joshua prophecy.

The attribution of our Georgian prophecy to Joshua could be explained with this tradition only (attested to in Qumran but, according to the specialists, not necessarily Qumranic by origin). And the disappearance of this attribution to Joshua from a later Christian tradition must be explained with inaccessibility of the relevant tradition on Joshua in the mediaeval Christianity.

This is certainly a strong argument for an early date of our collection of witnesses.

13. What Happened to the Two Florilegia, the Georgian and the Greek?

²⁵ Text and translation are quoted according to (García Martínez, Tigchelaar 1999: vol. 2, 1048-1049). Cf. (Dimant 2003/2014), (Dimant 2007), with further bibliography.

Providing that the attribution of the last Georgian witness to Joshua must be original, we should reconstruct the history of the attributions in our florilegium as the following. I do not consider the details of the original order of the witnesses (Table 10).

Table 10.

In Georgian	In Greek (Slavonic)
The section preserving the name of Nathan has been severely shortened. The witnesses of Baruch and Ps 131 have been dropped out.	The first section lost the name of Nathan, which has been shifted to replace the name of Joshua. A new prophecy of Nathan has been produced, whereas retaining the main part of the former witness of Joshua. A source common to recension D of the <i>Testamentum Salomonis</i> contributed at this stage. The reference to the <i>Ascensio Isaiae</i> has been dropped out.
It is possible that the prophecy of Baruch preserved in Greek has been produced from an earlier form of the prophecy of Joshua.	

It is goes without saying that our florilegium should be attributed to a very early Christian milieu, even though not necessarily to the first century. Such milieux saturated with Jewish traditions were preserved in Jerusalem until the time of discovery of the relics of St. Stephanus in 415.

14. Nathan's Prophecy in Visual Art

There is a unique fresco showing Prophet Nathan pointing out the Theotokos seating on the throne with the child (Fig. 1). This composition is specific to the "Greek/Slavonic" Nathan ("I saw a virgin... and a child in her hands/arms/bosom") and not to the "Georgian", whereas this fresco is preserved in Georgia. It has never been interpreted as illustrating our Nathan's prophecy and even never published properly. Therefore, we need to introduce it in a more systematic way.

The fresco is preserved in the apse of the narthex of church Nr 6 in the cave church complex of Sabereebi in the Gareja desert, Georgia, near 40 km north-east of the famous David Garejeli (of Gareja) Laura. Nathan is depicted near to the southern edge of the fresco (Figs. 2, 3 and 4); preserved are only the hand pointing to the Theotokos, a part of the head with the halo, and an inscription in a poor condition; the scroll at the bottom is, very likely, also related to Nathan.

Nothing is known about this cave monastery from the literary sources. The toponym Sabereebi (საბერეები) is late and means *μοναστήριον* in the etymological sense of a place where monks are or were living. The total amount of studies dedicated to the site is extremely low, even in Georgian²⁶, and the frescoes are so far unpublished. Zaza Skhirtladze, however, published the whole epigraphical material in (სხირტლაძე 1985). Moreover, the frescoes were studied, among few specialists, by one of the greatest scholars in the field of Georgian monumental painting, Tatiana Sheviakova²⁷ (Шевякова 1983: 9-14 and pls. 25-49). According to Sheviakova, the frescoes of church Nr 6 are to be dated approximately (from art-historical considerations) to the ninth century.

²⁶ See (Skhirtladze 2001: 156-160) for an elementary introduction and some bibliography. For the complete bibliography, see (სხირტლაძე 1985). In the twenty first century, there were no studies dedicated to the cave complex.

²⁷ Tatiana Sergeevna Sheviakova, née princess Shcherbatova (1905–2000), a disciple of the Russian and Armenian art historian Lydia Aleksandrovna Durnovo (1885–1963), used Durnovo's method of copying ancient painting in authentic technic thus obtaining a reconstruction of a better quality than it would be possible with the methods of photography, even those of our days. Since 1936, after having her husband arrested, she moved from St. Petersburg to Georgia where worked until her retirement in 1987. Since 1925, she produced more than 600 m² of such facsimile copies of mediaeval

In the apse of the narthex of church Nr 6, the two archangels on the right and on the left of the Theotokos are, according to the still readable inscriptions, Soriel (სორიელ) and Uriel (ურიელ), instead of the expectable Gabriel. Nevertheless, Gabriel and Michael (with the readable inscriptions as well, despite an extremely poor condition of the fresco) are in the nearby apse of church Nr 6 itself staying near the throne of Christ in glory. Thus, the four archangels form a row, left to right (from north to south): Michael, Gabriel, Soriel, and Uriel; already Sheviakova noticed that the two pairs of archangels form a unique group (Шевякова 1983: 11). This group is in the perfect accord with 1 Enoch 9:1 in Ethiopic (whereas parallel texts in Greek and Aramaic are a little bit different), where these four angels exactly in this order are enumerated as those who looked at the iniquity on the earth and asked God for the flood²⁸. This composition must have something to do with the ancient equation between the Ark of Noah, the Ark of the Covenant, and the Theotokos, but it is impossible, with our present knowledge, to go further in interpretation.

The inscription წი ნათან წინასწარმეტყველი “S(ain)t Nathan the prophet”, despite its poor condition, has been first read and published by Dimitri Gonashvili in 1965 (who, however, would have been able to see it in a better condition, especially when he visited the site in 1939 and 1941) and, then, with a detailed palaeographical analysis, by Zaza Skhirtladze²⁹. Skhirtladze was trying to find out a biblical reason for appearance of Nathan but without a great success³⁰.

Our fresco is certainly illustrating the Nathan’s prophecy as we read it in the Greek and Slavonic tradition. In Georgian, we have seen the same prophecy ascribed to Joshua bar Nun, which would have been closer to the original early Christian florilegium. Nevertheless, the attribution to Nathan has been proven to be old enough to appear in Georgia too.

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frescoes, which became museum showpieces themselves. The plates in her monograph “The Monumental Painting of the Early Middle Ages in Georgia” (Шевякова 1983) are mostly facsimiles made by herself.

²⁸ 1 Enoch 9:1 Ethiopic: “And then Michael, Gabriel, Suriel, and Uriel looked down from heaven and saw the mass of blood that was being shed on the earth and all the iniquity that was being done on the earth” etc. (Knibb 1978: vol. 1, 21 and vol. 2, 84-85). “Suriel” and “Soriel” are alternating spellings even in Georgian inscriptions: cf. (სხირტლაძე 1985: 49).

²⁹ See (გონაშვილი 1965: 52) and (სხირტლაძე 1985: 51-52). Unfortunately, Sheviakova did not know Gonashvili’s publication, whereas being unable herself to read the name of the prophet.

³⁰ His hypothesis of an allusion to 2 Sam. 7:1-16 (სხირტლაძე 1985: 52) is certainly unhelpful.

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LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Fig. 1: The fresco in the apse of the narthex of church Nr 6.

Fig. 2: The fragment with Nathan of the fresco in the apse of the narthex of church Nr 6.

Fig. 3: The fragment with Nathan with a view outside the church.

Fig. 4: The fragment with Nathan, from Sheviakova's facsimile copy (Шевякова 1983: Nr 32).

Fig. 1:



Fig. 2:



Fig. 3:



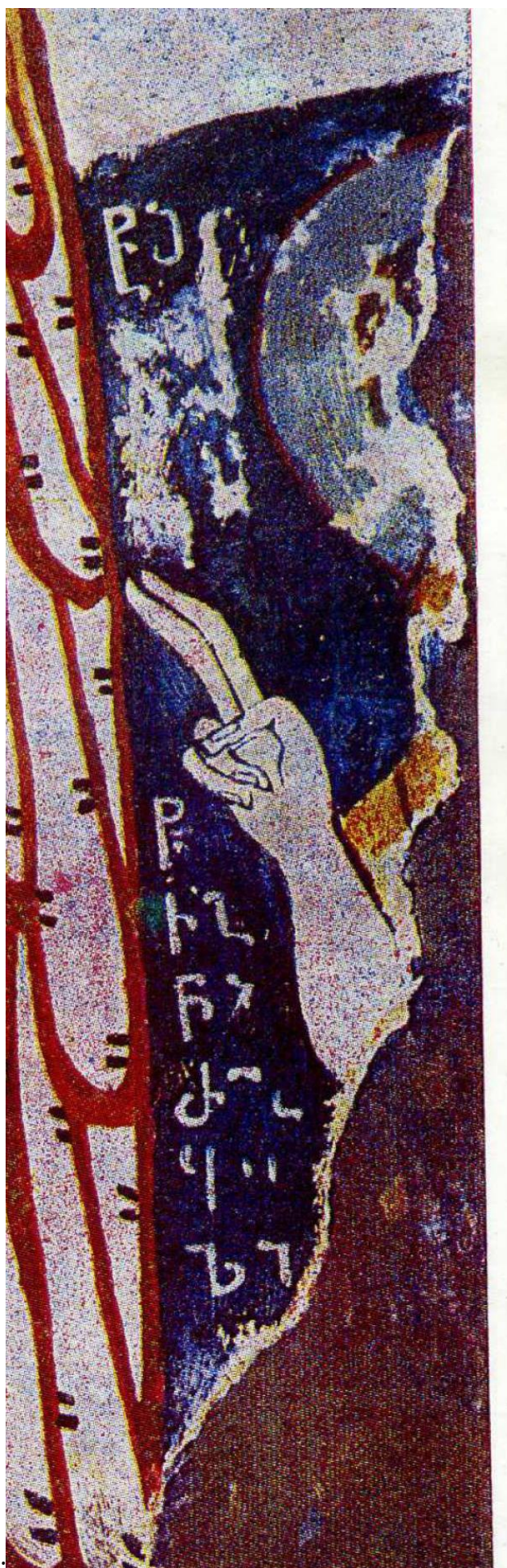


Fig. 4:

