

Nino Sakvarelidze

Liturgie als Symbol und Mysterium. Die Himmelsliturgie des Dionysius Areopagites und ihre altgeorgische Rezeption (Orientalia Biblica et Christiana, Bd. 20), Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verl., 2014, XXV + 423 p., ISBN 978-3-447-10133-2.

Nino Sakvareladze wrote probably the most unusual book among the studies on the *Corpus Areopagiticum*. As it is stated in its title, it is dedicated to Areopagite's reception in the Old Georgian culture. Indeed, the Georgian culture belongs to those where the Areopagitic works were not only translated but continuously read and appreciated almost on the same level as the New Testament, immediately after the Pauline epistles. The situation was similar in the Byzantine and several Syriac-speaking cultures, but not in the Latin one and especially not in the Armenian and Slavic-speaking ones, where the *Corpus Areopagiticum* has been translated but has never reached such a universal authority. Areopagite is one of the key figures for the Old Georgian culture since the eleventh century, when famous Ephrem Mtsire (Ep'rem Mc'ire) made the translation. One can suppose that the very need of Georgian translation resulted from increasing of Areopagite's authority in Byzantium.

Since the 1950s, it became difficult to write about the Old Georgian culture without mentioning Areopagite. This fashion, however, was established due to Shalva Nutsubidze's and Ernst Honigmann's hypothesis that the author of the *Corpus* was Peter the Iberian. In mediaeval Georgia, however, nobody would have shared such a supposition, and the popularity of the *Corpus* was based on its attribution to the disciple of Apostle Paul. Thus, Sakvareladze deals with Areopagite as he was known in mediaeval Georgia and not with Peter the Iberian. Her most important personage is Ephrem Mtsire, and her most important topic becomes the terminology of his translation.

In many respects, Sakvareladze's book could be classified among the *instrumenta studiorum*, very useful for all those who study Areopagite and necessarily to those who study any topic related to the Georgian Neoplatonism and the late mediaeval Georgian culture.

I would consider the book as consisting from two parts that, theoretically, could be published separately. The first one is formed with the chapters 1 ("Das Dionysius-Bild im Lichte der Internationalen Forschung", pp. 14–114) and 2 ("Das Dionysius-Bild im Lichte der areopagitischen Schau der Liturgie," pp. 115–166), and the second with the long final chapter 3 ("Das Dionysius-Bild im Lichte der altgeorgischen Rezeption des areopagitischen Denkkosmos," pp. 167–317). Also of importance is the Anhang II, Altgriechisch-altgeorgisches Glossar (pp. 370–381).

Chapter 1 is a balanced review of the Dionysian studies up to the beginning of the twenty-first century. The author focuses on the interpretations of the contents and provenance of the *Corpus* rather than its manuscript traditions in different languages and purely text-critical problems. Nevertheless, the recent studies on the early Syriac tradition that preserves an earlier form of the text than the extant Greek one (esp. those by István Perczel) did not escape her attention. If I would like to add something to her survey, it could be only some recent publications on the possible late Neoplatonic connexions of Dionysius, especially with Damascius.¹

In the “Zusammenfassung” of ch. 1, the author reveals the driving force of her personal interest to the modern scholarship: there is, in the modern scholarship, an approach “... die keinen Widerspruch zu erkennen vermag zwischen der neuplatonisch-philosophischen Gestaltung und dem wahrhaft christlichen Inhalt der liturgischen Theologie des Areopagites, zwischen der Mysteriensprache des Dionysius und der überlieferten christlichen Tradition der sakramentalen Mystik. Diese dritte ausgewogene und versöhnende, ‘friedensstiftende’ Position mag das Wesen der philosophischen Theologie und theologischen Philosophie, liturgischen Theologie und theologischen Liturgie des Areopagites am besten erleuchten. Mit dieser Haltung basiert such die altgeorgische Rezeption des Areopagites ...” (pp. 113–114).

Chapter 2 is dedicated to the liturgical topics, sometimes very technical. The author’s approach, to my opinion, is in the line of that of Alexander Golitzin, whose book² is often cited with approval. An especially useful feature of this chapter is its “bilingualism”: each Greek term is accompanied with its Georgian equivalent, in order to allow to the reader familiarising with the Georgian language of the Ephrem Mtsire’s translation.

A little shortcoming of this chapter is a bit anachronistic acceptance of J. Stiglmayr’s 1898 distinction, in Dionysius, between six “Mysterienvorgänge” (those to which the six chapters of the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* are dedicated) and three “heiligen christlichen Mysterien” (p. 133). Stiglmayr, indeed, believed, that there are seven quite specific “Church sacraments,” whereas all other rites are no more than mere “rites”. Fortunately, the real situation was not like this,

1 Cf. recent papers by Tuomo Lankila (with further bibliography), esp. “The Corpus Areopagiticum as a Crypto-Pagan Project,” *Journal for Late Antique Religion and Culture*, 5 (2011), pp. 14–40.

2 A. Golitzin, Et introibo ad Altare Dei. *The Mystagogy of Dionysius Areopagite with special reference to its predecessors in the Eastern Christian tradition* (Ανάλεκτα Βλατάδων, 59), Thessalonike, 1994. Golitzin published as well a number of important papers on the Areopagite, which are also taken into account by the author.

because the very idea of some quite specific “sacraments” is of late and purely “Latin” origin. It must be stated, however, that the idea of specific “Dionysian sacraments” as distinct by nature from other Church rites is still present in modern scholarship, and Sakvareladze is able to quote P. Rorem and G. Heil (p. 134, fn. 116). Thus, she quotes (ibid.) from P. Rorem’s commentary to Pseudo-Dionysius (1993), p. 97, that “...ordination, tonsure, and funerals are not Dionysian sacraments.” I doubt that such thing as “Dionysian sacrament,” in the Latin sense implying a sharp distinction between the “sacraments” and the other rites could be extracted from Dionysian writings with any other mean than a “Latinising” theological exegesis.

The third and most important chapter contains, first of all, a very detailed analysis of Ephrem Mtsire’s theological terminology. In this way, it is an important addition to the recent *Old Georgian-Greek Documented Dictionary of Philosophical-Theological Terminology* by D. Melik’išvili, A. Xaranauli, and L. Gigineišvili (in Georgian, 2 vols, Tbilisi 2010). This terminology has impregnated, however, the whole Georgian late mediaeval culture. No wonder that the final pages of the chapter (pp. 323–326) are dedicated to the great Georgian epic poet Shota Rustaveli (12th cent.) who refers to Areopagite in his classical poem *The Knight in the Panther Skin*. These references are no more than an example of Areopagites’ presence in the atmosphere of the Georgian culture of the epoch of the “Christian Neoplatonism” revival marked by the name of Neoplatonic Christian philosopher John Petritsi (11th/12th cent.). The phenomenon of this revival – different in many respects from the so-called “Proclus renaissance” in the 11th–12th cent. Byzantium – is still insufficiently studied. Nino Sakvareladze provided to its future researchers an indispensable *instrumentum studiorum*.

Any future work in the fields of the late mediaeval Georgian theology, philosophy, and culture in general becomes hardly imaginable without addressing this Sakvareladze’s book.

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