

Phasis 11, 2008

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RECEPTION OF II CENTURY GREEK APOLOGETICS IN OLD GEORGIAN LITERATURE

Apologetics as a genre of Christian Literature originated in the 2nd century. Literally it means 'defending oneself', 'justification', 'defensive speech'. Its main purpose was to defend Christianity from various accusations, justification of Christians (atheism, cannibalism, incest), as well as dissemination of Christianity and showing its priorities.¹ Consequently, the apologetic works can conventionally be divided into 2 parts: the first is negative, polemics with the opponents, mostly with pagans and Judaists; the second is positive – delivering Christian teachings and proving its priorities. It is the second part that distinguishes apologetics from the polemic literature as such. The genre model of apologetics can be found as early as the Ancient epoch in Hellenic as well as Judaic traditions.²

The structure of the apologetic works is mainly as follows (with more or less deviations): Addressing the addressee: the emperor (Hadrian, Antoninus Pius, Marcus Aurelius, Commodus, Lucius), Romans and the Roman senate, a friend (Autolicus, Diognetus), opponent (the Barbarians, pagans, Hellenes, etc.); critics of paganism (faiths of the Barbarians and Hellenes) and Judaism; depicting the moral and ways of life of the Christians, proving the priority of the Christian doctrine.

The literary sources of the apologetics are: The books of Old and New Testament, mythography, Classical (Ancient) literature, Judaic literature, philosophers of the Classical period (Platonism, Aristotelians, Pithagorism, Epicureism, Stoicism). This is an incomplete list of the sources used

¹ The Encyclopedia of Religion, London 1987, 349; DTC, I, 1931, 1511.

² Altaner B., Stuiber A., Patrologie, Freiburg, Bazel, Wien 1966, 43-57.

by the apologists. It is revealed in their judgments, argumentations, abundant citations so often met in their works.

The main apologetic themes are: apologists and polytheism, apologists and Judaism, apologists and philosophy, apologists and the Empire, apologists and the Christian doctrine.

Ancient Greek apologetic literature directly follows the apostles' written heritage. The first Christians surrounded by the pagan and Jewish environment often had to defend themselves from various accusations. That was the reason that the apologists broke the 'saeculi silentium' (Silence of the Century) and publicly acknowledged themselves as the followers of Christianity.³ They appealed to the contemporaries, as a rule, authorities, emperors, kings, and tried to convince them the advantages of Christianity as the true faith. The origin of apologetics as an early Christian literary genre is not only of literary but of historical and political significance as well which reflected the epochal change - severe repressions of the Christians, persecution and physical destruction was changed by verbal confrontations, disputes, polemics. This is an epoch called 'the epoch of martyrs and apologists'.⁴

Among the Greek apologists Aristides of Athens was one of the first whose apology was written for the Emperor Hadrian (117-138). Biographical facts about him are rather scarce and are based on Eusebius of Caesarea's *From the Church History* (*HE*, IV, 3, 3) and *Chronicles* (*Chron. Ad ann.*, 124-125).⁵

The Aristides' text at hand cannot be considered the original. It is a reconstruction of the text according to the Syrian translation, Armenian fragments and the Greek revised metaphor edition. The reconstructed text consists of 17 chapters and structured as follows: Chapter I - confirmation of God's existence; Chapters II-XIII - critique of various pagan religions (Chaldeans, Greeks, Egyptians); Chapter XIV - critique of Judaism; Chapters XV-XVI - apology of Christianity; Chapter XVII - Conclusion.

The Georgian translation of Aristides' *Apology* does not exist in Old Georgian Literature but the study of the Georgian Christian texts makes it clear that Georgian authors, especially hagiographers, were acquainted with the author and his work as well as generally they were aware of the

³ Lepelley Cl., *L'empire Romain et le christianisme*, Paris 1969, 28-30.

⁴ Nouvelle Histoire de l'église, I, Paris, Seuil 1963, 119; Lietzmann H., *Histoire de l'église ancienne*, Paris 1963, 174.

⁵ Aristide, *Apologie*, Sch. 470, Paris 2003, 25-26.

ancient Greek apologetic literature. Apologetic themes and motifs frequently appear in a number of hagiographic texts.

The ancient tradition of the Georgian hagiographic monuments, martyrdoms, though the texts might have reached us in later editions or manuscripts (*St. Nino's Life, Martyrdom of St. Shushanik, Razhden the first-martyr, Evstati Mtskheteli, Abibos Nekreseli*) reflect the Georgians' religious struggle against the Persians (4th-6th cc.). The first saints of the Georgian Church, in accordance with the epochal political context, declare religious war with Mazdeism (Zoroastrianism), the ancient faith of the Persians. The hagiographic texts on this epoch contain polemics against paganism in general and in particular – against Astrolatry and Pirolatry, the constituent parts of Zoroastrianism. It is a well-known fact that the dissemination of Zoroastrianism in Georgia has a long-time history and is connected with the epoch of the Achaemenids (6th c. BC) when Mazdeism co-existed together with local pagan cults. Georgian paganism knows various manifestations of idolatry including Astrolatry and Pirolatry the traces of which can be found not only in material (archaeology) but spiritual cultural monuments as well (folklore, ethnography, literature). It is through the archaeological and historical sources that the existence of Persian magi communities is proved in Mtskheta, Kartli, at the beginning of the Christian period. They used to have their ritual places there during the reign of king Vakhtang. The previous tolerant religious co-existence was changed into sharp confrontation in the Sassanid period. This is the period since which the Georgian Church gains its saints.

In *Martyrdom of St. Shushanik*, the oldest Georgian hagiographic monument, in queen Shushanik's words to her husband – 'You rejected the true God and worshiped the fire'⁶ – we already hear a famous apologetic motif ('Fire is not God') which is reiterated in almost all Greek apologetic works (Aristides, Athenagoras, Iustinus, Tatianus, etc.).⁷

Saint Razhden is mentioned in Georgian Christian tradition as the first martyr⁸. This noble Persian arrived in Kartli during the King Vakhtang's reign. He became the follower of the Christian faith that caused his arrest and trial. As a reply to the Persian king Peroz's question '...why did you reject your own faith, and instead of the bright sun, the fire, and other ce-

⁶ *Martyrdom of St. Shushanik* (IV, 9-11) in: *Monuments of Old Georgian Hagiographic Literature*, I, Tbilisi 1963, 15.

⁷ See Aristides, *Apologia*, V, 3; Athenagoras, VI, 4; Theophilus, *Ad Autolyicum*, II, 5; St. Iustinus, *I Apologia*, 10, 2; 13, 1; *II Apologia*, 4, 2; 5, 2.

⁸ *Martyrdom of Razhden the first-martyr* in: *Reader in Old Georgian Literature*, I, Tbilisi, 240-246.

lestial you serve the crucified man...?' (*Martyrdom*, 243, 28-32), he pronounces his famous speech against the Zoroastrianism, with again reiterating the famous apologetic theme: 'It is truly as you said, my lord, for I have become Christian, rejected godlessness and never any more serve either the burning fire or the sun, created to be served by men, but I believe in the living God who created heaven and earth, all creatures visible and invisible, that are eternally immortal...' (*Martyrdom*, 243, 33-37).

The polemics of Abibos Nekreseli (6th c.),⁹ one of the 13 Syrian fathers, is also addressed against Zoroastrianism and consequently, reveals the proximity towards the apologetic themes. He rejects 'this habit of the Babylonians' and to the Marzpan's question why he killed their god he gives the answer in a long citation similar to Evstati's speech. It can easily be noted that Abibos's speech abides in apologetic motifs that confirms that the author was well aware of the apologetic literature: 'You should understand that I did not kill the God but extinguished the fire, for it is not a god but a piece of one matter from which God created this world' (*Martyrdom*, II, 245, 5-23). On the ground of the analysis of the above mentioned text Korneli Kekelidze made a supposition that here we can find the influence of George Amartol's chronicle.¹⁰ In our opinion it is more logical to assume that both of these works had one common source of influence – apologetic literature.¹¹ It is a well known fact that while creating his work Giorgi Amartoli had the works of 'the spiritual fathers' at hand. As early as the first centuries Aristides' *Apology* became a classical work making influence on other apologists (Athenagoras, Iustinus, Theophilus, etc.) as well as on the Christian authors of the following centuries. A number of themes from Aristides' *Apology*, especially the differentiation between various pagan cults – Chaldean and Babylonian astrolatry and pyrolatry, Egyptian's zoolatry and Greek's idolatry – became the so called 'loci communes' of the church literature.

The above fragments clarify that the impact of the apologetic texts are greatly significant in the monuments of old Georgian literature. The influence is the greatest on one of the oldest hagiographic monument – *The Martyrdom of Evstati Mtskheteli* (6th c.). The fact that the anonymous author is perfectly well acquainted with the monuments of early Christian litera-

⁹ *Martyrdom of Abibos Nekreseli*, Monuments..., I, 240-248.

¹⁰ Kekelidze K., *Studies from the History of Old Georgian Literature*, III, Tbilisi 1955, 55.

¹¹ See Aristides, *Apologia*, III, 2; IV, 2; Athenagoras, *Supplicatio*, VI, 4; VI, 1; XII, 2; XIII, 2 etc; St. Iustinus, *I Apologia*, 9, 2; 9, 3; Tatianus, *Oratio*, 8, 2-5; 21, 3; Hermias, *Irrisio*, II; IV, 7-18; *Ad Diognetum*, II, 2; II, 7; II, 4; VIII, 4, etc.

ture (Old and New Testaments, Didache, old martyrdoms, Greek apologists – Aristides' *Apology*, Tatiane's *Diatesaron*, etc.) was not once noted in the scientific literature (A. Harnac, I. Javakhishvili, K. Kekelidze and others). The above mentioned work is interesting in many ways. The main conflict of the period between Christianity and Zoroastrianism in the 6th century Georgia found its expression in this very monument.

Evstati's martyrdom is important for us exactly from the viewpoint of Aristides' influence. The impact is so significant that enables us to speak about the existence of a Georgian fragment of Aristides inserted into the Georgian hagiographic text. Evstati, brought in front of the Marzpan for questioning pronounces his famous speech on defense of Christianity in which he denounces Zoroastrianism. It can be said that here Evstati is represented as a traditional character of old apologies, a person seeking the truth who gets acquainted with different religions and cults, magus beliefs, Hebrew religion, Christianity... Evstati's speech (*Martyrdom*, IV-VII) mainly delivers Archdeacon Samuel's teachings. In the second part of the speech (*Martyrdom*, VII) Evstati rejects pagans' idolatry and fire worship. In his polemics he reiterates Aristides' argumentations against pagan cults, astrolatry and especially pirolatry that were especially urgent issues for him. Here Evstati abruptly interrupts his speech and begins praying. The last part of the fragment does not correspond with the critics of pilolatry. As K. Kekelidze remarked, the manuscript can be incomplete.¹² In my opinion, this passage once again proves that the author of the *Martyrdom* follows Aristides' apologetic text. He takes from the text the above mentioned fragment about incest which seems out of context for Evstati but this theme appears in Aristides' text (Syrian version) where it is generally directed against pagan religions. The above presented arguments suffice to prove that the anonymous author of *Martyrdom* was well acquainted with the apologetic literature, their argumentation 'adversus paganos' that was widely spread in early Christian literature. And the situation is typical as well: just as the second century apologist, the first Christians appealed to the Roman emperors while trying to protect the Christian faith from the pagan accusations. Likewise, Evstati, newly converted to the Christian faith, pronounces his speech in front of the higher authorities and asserts the priority of the Christian religion (*Martyrdom*, II, 31, 29; III, 33, 3).

Similarly interesting is the passage from the *Martyrdom* where the author makes Samuel speak on different religions of humanity. This is also a

¹² Kekelidze K., *History of Old Georgian Literature*, I, Tbilisi, 1980, 514.

popular theme of the apologetic literature. Georgian author, like the apologists, distinguishes between 3 races of man. However, instead of various worships he only distinguishes 'the religion of the Persians' as it was most actual and urgent for him.

As for the popular statement of the apologists that God created the world 'for the need of men' (χρησις), it is also frequently repeated by the author of the *Martyrdom*. It should be noted that the enumeration of the Creation is more detailed with the *Martyrdom* author where instead of the apologetic words 'καὶ τὰ λοιπὰ' ('and so on') he enumerates different elements in detail: 'God who created heaven and earth, the sun and the moon and the stars, water and land, rivers and oceans, mountains and hills, fields and forests, wood and fire, animals and beasts, reptiles and birds, after this God created man and made him master of all the rest, He made everything subordinate to man and how should we all abandon God and serve thing created by Him? Never should it be done this way!' (*Martyrdom*, VII, 42, 27-32).

Similar to Aristides, the *Martyrdom* author thinks that the main mistake of the pagans was the confusion of the Creator with the created. Among all the elements created by God and 'are themselves not gods' he distinguishes on one hand, celestial bodies (sun, moon, stars), and on the other hand - fire on which he pays particular attention as it is urgent issue for him in polemics against Zoroastrianism: 'The sun, the moon and the stars are not gods, rather God commanded the sun to light the day and the moon and the stars - light the night. To the cloud God commanded to cover the shining sun and moon. For this reason the sun and the moon cannot be gods. Besides, neither is the fire god. Wherever he spreads, if it meets a man, it extinguishes. Also the water can extinguish the fire and put out its power. For this reason it is not god, but we serve it as the one.' (*Martyrdom*, VII, 42, 34-35; VII, 43, 1-14).

The author's argumentation partially differs from the one of Aristides but it corresponds to the Aristidean pathos that the Creator is mightier that the things created by Him, and that the substances subjected to disintegration, decrease, reduction, disappearance - cannot be gods. As for the Aristides' argumentation on fire, here the *Martyrdom* author literally follows Aristides' apologetic text¹³.

¹³ See Aristides, *Apologia*, I, 2; III, 2; IV, 2; VII, 1-3. Compare: Athenagoras, *Supplicatio*, VI, 1-4; XII, 2; XIII, 2-9; XVI, 4-5; XVII, 5; Theophilus, *Ad Autolyicum*, II, 5; II, 5-6; St. Iustinus, *I Apologia*, 9, 2-3; Tatianus, *Oratio*, 21, 1; *Ad Diognetum*, II, 5; Hermias, *Irrisio*, II; IV, 7-18; XII, etc.

The fact that the anonymous author follows both – Greek (on 3 races) and Syrian (incest theme) texts points to the fact that the anonymous author had at his hand not the Syrian or later Greek metaphrastic version (inserted into the text of *Varlaam and Josaphat*) but the old text, the original, from which these versions might be produced.

Though the illustrating passages from the *Martyrdom* are relatively short and few, they undoubtedly contain the fragments from Aristides' *Apology*. The anonymous author knows the apologetic text very well, borrows passages, arguments and masterfully uses them in his polemics. He treats Aristides' text with liberty, displaces the passages, abridges or expands them, partially changes the text but nevertheless he is close to the Aristides' text, sometimes it is also possible to speak about textual coincidences. It is not surprising as this method is quite popular in hagiographic literature. Protagonists of *Martyrdoms* are often made speak with the passages borrowed from the apologetic literature (H.-I. Marrou calls it the 'apologetic nucleus' of Byzantine hagiographic literature)¹⁴.

The fact that *Martyrdom of Evstati Mtskheteli* is a 6th century text is significant in other context as well, namely, in connection to the attribution of the Greek Christian romance *Varlaam and Josaphat*. We know the history of Aristides' apologetic text: it was discovered as the insertion into the Greek Christian romance *Varlaam and Josaphat*. The Georgian version of the romance does not contain Aristides' apologetic text. As it is considered the Greek version is three times longer than the Georgian one and contains numerous theological passages. According to the scholars, the apologetic text might have been added to the Greek version by Ekvtime Iberieli, supposedly the author of the Greek version. In our opinion, the fact that the tradition of inserting Aristides' apologetic fragments is confirmed in old Georgian literature since 6th century supports the argumentation in Ekvtime's favor.

Apologetic works, in most cases, are similar and repeat one another in terms of structure, themes, motifs, argumentations. However, each author and work is distinguished by style, author's temper, pathos; they put different accents and pay attention to different themes. Apologetic themes became the so called 'Loci communes' for the Christian literature. During the centuries of the development of the Christian literature apologetic discourses can be met in completely different works of various authors, especially in hagiography. The Greek Christian literature makes great impact on the literary traditions of other countries including Georgian literature.

¹⁴ Marrou H. I. (éd.), Diognète A., SC, 33, Paris 1965, 27-28.

Old Georgian authors are well acquainted with Greek apologists (Aristides, Iustinus, Melito, Pseudo-Sextus), mention their names, make citations from their apologetic works using them in the necessary contexts in an original way.

The inter-textual study of hagiographic works reveals that it is possible to speak generally about the influence of the apologetic literature on the old Georgian literature.