

Some linguistic features of Arabic-Georgian-Greek translation

— with examples from the *Balavariani*

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Introduction

Medieval Georgian Christian literature was historically influenced by both Greek and Arabic literary traditions. While most Christian texts were translated directly from Greek, some were translated from Greek via Arabic or Syriac. This presents a challenge for philologists: with the lack of external evidence, how to determine whether a manuscript was translated directly from Greek or through a Semitic language?

Balavariani is particularly noteworthy in this context. The manuscript, Greek Patriarchal Library MS Ge. 140, was discovered in the early 20th century and published by Iliia Abuladze in 1957. *Balavariani* belongs to the greater tradition of *Barlaam and Josaphat*, a collection of Buddhist birth stories (*jātaka*) translated from Indic via Manichaean Middle Persian into Arabic. The newly discovered Georgian manuscript has helped scholars to determine the relationship between the Arabic, Georgian and Greek versions of *Barlaam and Josaphat*: The direction of translation is Arabic → Georgian → Greek. This makes *Balavariani* one of only two known texts (along with *Abukura*) to have been translated from Georgian into Greek.

This poster will illustrate linguistic features of Arabic-Georgian and Georgian-Greek translation with examples from the *Balavariani*.

Arabic-Georgian Translation in *Balavariani*

❖ Proper names

While the proper names in Georgian show close affinity to the Arabic forms, Greek tends to "Septuagintize" them when a similar-sounding Biblical name is available.

Manichaean New Persian	<i>Bwdysf</i> <Skt. <i>bodhisattva</i> >	<i>Bylwhr</i> (1) <Skt. <i>puṛhita</i> 'house priest' ? or (2) <MPers. <i>bēlōr</i> 'crystal' + <i>gōhr</i> 'jewel'	-	-
Arabic	يوداسف ~ يوداسف <i>Bādūsaf</i> ~ <i>Yūdāsaf</i> (misreading/scrabble error of and <y>)	بلوهر <i>Bilawhar</i>	جنيسر <i>Ġunaysar</i> <Skt. <i>Śuddhodana</i> with misreading of Pahlavi script?	سرندب <i>Sarandib</i> 'Sri Lanka'
Georgian	იოდასფ <i>Iodasap</i> (based on the corrupted Arabic Y-form)	ბალაჰვარ <i>Balahvar</i>	აბენეს Abenes	სარნადიბ <i>Sarnadib</i> (metathesis)
Greek	Ιώασαφ (analogy to Ιωσήφ?)	Βαρλαάμ (analogy to existing Septuagint name)	Ἀβεννήρ (analogy to existing Septuagint name)	Σενναάφ (Place name in Mesopotamia, analogy to existing Septuagint name)

❖ "Semitic *da*"

Arabic circumstantial (*ḥāl*) clause introduced by the conjunction *wa-* 'and' is calqued with Georgian *და da* 'and', although *ს* subclause with Ge. *როდესაც rodesac* 'when', *ვითარცა vitarca* 'as, when' would be more idiomatic.

<i>qāla būdāsaf: kayfa yakūna 'aḥwaḡu 'aḡhābi-ka 'aktaru min-nī mālan wa-qad waṣafta min ḥāli-him mā waṣafta 'am kayfa 'aḡinnu bi-hī 'idā kuṭru wa-'ana l-yawma bi-hī 'aḡhā</i> (ed. Gimaret 1972: 101)	<i>hrkua Iodasap: vitar iqos uglaxakesi moquasta šen tay umdidres čemsa da šen priadsa uḡoarebasa matsa itqode ! anu vitar davzwirde, ražams ganmravlden sapaseni čemni, da me dyes uxu var?</i> (Abuladze ed. 1957: 81)
Budasf: Comment le plus nécessaire de tes compagnons a-t-il plus de bien que moi, après ce que (=wa 'and') tu m'as décrit de leur état, et comment en serai-je avare quand je l'aurai en abondance, alors qu' (=wa 'and') aujourd'hui j'en fais largesse? (tr. Gimaret 1971: 134)	Iodasaph said: "How can the poorest of your companions be richer than I and (=whereas) you spoke of their extreme poverty? Or how should I become miserly when my treasures are multiplied, and(=whereas) I am lavish in giving today? (Abuladze tr. in Lang 1966: 38)

❖ Literal translation with substituted religious elements

Translating the *Balavariani* from Arabic into Georgian also entails transforming an Islamic story into a Christian hagiography. In passages clearly based on the Arabic version, basic sentence structure and function words (in blue) are retained, while Islamic vocabularies (in red) are replaced with corresponding Christian concepts.

wa-qad 'azamtu l'ān 'a mala fi 'amri 'aḡhirafī 'amalan 'alā qadri mā kāna min qawati 'amalī fi 'amri d-dunyā wa-lam 'aḡidu li-dālika waḡhan 'illā 'an l-ḡaḡqa bi-n-nussāki. (ed. Gimaret 1972: 21; cf. Quran 2:127)	<i>aç</i> mnebavs, rayta viyuaco sauḡunoysa mistwis zlierad, vitarca ese moyuace var sopelsa amas šina aramed araray ars sxuay čemda, garna šertvad monata mat kristesta , romelta-igi zravali čiri ševamtxwie. (ed. Abuladze 1957: 13)
I have therefore resolved now to work for the affair of my afterlife with as much force as I have worked for the affair of the world , and I have found no other way of doing so than to join the ascetics . (my translation)	Now I wish to strive mightily towards the life eternal , to the same degree that I have striven in the affairs of this world . I see no other alternative but to unite myself to Christ's servants , whom I have subjected to such great persecution. (tr. Lang 1966: 61)

Georgian-Greek Translation in *Balavariani*

❖ Mistranslation from Georgian into Greek

Two mistranslations in the Greek version of *Barlaam and Josaphat* can be best explained if they are translated from Greek.

➤ Example 1: მატლოა *maṭlta* 'worms (obl. pl.)' is misread as მტერთა *mṭerta* 'enemies (obl. pl.)'. (Qauxčišvili 1973, cited in Lang 1966: 58)

<i>dyes ganumzadis čamadi novagt-moquaresa da xvale šesačmelad maṭlta mistsis igi.</i> (ed. Abuladze 1957: 8)	σήμερον γὰρ βρώμασιν ἠδέσει τὸν φάρυγγα αὐτῶν καταλένας, κατάβρωμα τοῖς ἐχθροῖς ὄλους αὐτοὺς αἴριον τίθησι. (ed. Volk 2006: 126)
Today it prepares the gourmet a sumptuous banquet, and tomorrow it turns him over as food for the worms . (tr. Lang 1966: 58)	To-day it tickleth their gullet with pleasant dainties; to-morrow it maketh them nought but a gobbet for their enemies . (tr. Woodward & Mattingly 1914: 127)

➤ Example 2: მკერვალი *mkervali* 'tailor' is misread as მკურნალი *mkurnali* 'physician'. (Qauxčišvili 1973, cited in Rayfield 2000: 64)

<i>qāla 'anā raḡulun 'artuqu l-kalāma bi-l-kalāmi</i> (ed. Gimaret 1972: 20)	<i>hrkua vnebulman: me kaci var siṡqwiša mḡkervali</i> (ed. Abuladze 1957: 12)	ὁ δὲ πένης ἐκεῖνος καὶ ἀσθενής, Ἐγὼ, φησὶν, ἄνθρωπός εἰμι θεραπευτῆς ῥημάτων. (ed. Volk 2006: 30)
Oui, dit-il. Je suis un homme qui recommande la parole par la parole. (tr. Gimaret 1971: 73)	The wounded man answered: "I am a patcher of words." (tr. Lang 1966: 61)	The poor sick man answered, 'I am a physician of words.' (tr. Woodward & Mattingly 1914: 39)

❖ "Metaphrastic" translation

The Greek translation of *Barlaam and Josaphat* is often characterised as "metaphrastic" (cf. Høgel 2021). The translation (or "metaphrase") involves extensive paraphrasing, rewriting, and insertion of biblical verses and excerpts from other Christian texts with the intent to "Christianize" the narrative elements.

➤ Example: Insertion of Biblical verse from Ephesians 6:12.

<i>da čarvida kaci igi munve, udabnosa gare, čmidata mamata tana.</i> (ed. Abuladze 1957: 9)	Καὶ ἐξελθὼν ὁ τοῦ Θεοῦ ἄνθρωπος ἀνεχώρησεν εἰς τὴν ἔρημον, λυπούμενος μὲν ὅτι οὐ μεμαρτύρηκε, μαρτυρῶν δὲ καθ' ἡμέραν τῇ συνειδήσει καὶ ἀντιπαλαίων πρὸς τὰς ἀρχὰς καὶ ἐξουσίας, πρὸς τοὺς κοσμοκράτορας τοῦ σκότους τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου, πρὸς τὰ πνευματικὰ τῆς πονηρίας, ὡς φησὶν ὁ μακάριος Παῦλος. (ed. Volk 2006: 24)
So that man departed immediately and withdrew to the wilderness outside to join the holy Fathers. (tr. Lang 1966: 59)	So the man of God went out and withdrew to the desert, grieved to have lost the crown of martyrdom, but daily a martyr in his conscience, and 'wrestling against principalities and powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness'; as saith Blessed Paul. (tr. Woodward & Mattingly 1914: 31)

Conclusions

The linguistic evidence presented in this poster assists philologists in determining the textual relationship between the Arabic, Georgian, and Greek versions of *Barlaam and Josaphat*. Future research could focus on developing criteria based on the linguistic features of the *Balavariani* and other texts translated between Arabic, Georgian, and Greek. These criteria can be applied to manuscripts with undetermined source language, enhancing our understanding of their origins.

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