

Ioane Petritsi and His Philosophical-theological Project

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Ioane Petritsi holds a special place in Georgian intellectual culture, along with such figures as Shota Rustaveli, Solomon Dodashvili, Nikoloz Baratashvili and Ilia Chavchavadze. Those names signify breaking through certain world-view stereotypes, escaping frames of tradition, modifying the tradition through the light of new knowledge and experience. Any tradition, unless it is creatively rethought through the light of universal intellectual processes and developments of this or that epoch, leaves no space for an explosion and continues to turn in circles. Such thinkers as Petritsi bear a credit of cutting through and opening such circles. In particular, Petritsi introduced into Georgian intellectual culture philosophy in the initial, Classical meaning of this notion. This notion implies a natural human propensity, striving, desire to understand and explain the universe not through some ready-made outer schemes (religious, ideological, cultural), but through one's own intellectual efforts, through actualization of one's own innate intellectual principle. This actualization was called by Greeks *dialectics*, and it has its own order and culture. Dialectics, although the term carries much ambiguities, can be defined as a dynamic space of objective thinking, in which a person who is involved in dialectic process of thought believes that through this method he or she comes out from a particular, personal, subjective space and thinks as all humanity would have thought, that is to say, universally. Such a universal thinking implies also negotiated and agreed-upon terms and notions, for otherwise this will not be any more a dialectical thought, for dialectics implicates a real or a virtual co-thinker, who acknowledges and shares a system of notions and terms, understands their semantics, and therefore, it is possible to convince such a person by means of logical inferences (or as Petritsi says, by means of "syllogistic compulsion"). However, as I have noted, this thought is based upon a primordial and personal grand passion – to understand the universe and through this understanding establish an adequate, authentic relationship with it, to "get it right" so to say. It follows then, that philosophical-dialectical reasoning is on the one hand extremely personal and subjective – for it is as impossible to fall into a collective wonder about reality and collective passion for its understanding, as it is impossible to fall in love collectively –

and on the other hand universal and addressing to all humanity. Especially this belief in universality kindles in a philosopher an unquenchable desire to share his/her thoughts to others, and not only a desire, but also a feeling of a duty to do so. Petritsi arrived to Georgia from Constantinople where he got a philosophical education most probably under Michael Psellus and/or John Italus, exactly with this desire to share his ideas, with a lucid vision of his truly missionary role.

However, philosophy entered Georgia first through translation of John of Damascus' "Dialectic". John of Damascus (8th century) elaborated Porphyry's "Introduction to Aristotle's Categories" and added it to his work "The Source of Knowledge". As writes Ephrem Mtsire (11th century), the first Georgian translator of the "Dialectic", before this text, no text of similar contents had ever been translated into Georgian. In the same century, this text was translated anew by Arsen of Iqalto, apparently due to his discontent with the quality of exactitude of the previous translation. Ephrem justifies himself in undertaking the translation of philosophic chapters by the purpose of providing Christians dialectic means for fending themselves from and moreover defeating pagan philosophers through their own weapons. That is to say, Ephrem makes philosophy a servant of Christian religion and theology. Perhaps Arsen goes further than him. My ground for supposing this is that King David the Builder (1089-1125), whose teacher and spiritual father Arsen was, says in his famous "Prayers of Repentance" that he studied Greek philosophy, which he even calls "divine wisdom" alluding to the Apostle Paul (1 Cor. 1:21). It is most plausible that Arsen was his guide in studying philosophy. And there is an interesting phrase attributed to King David: "I am a man of that time, when Arsen ate dried bread, translated Gregory of Nyssa and, he alone, made the candle of the Holy Sophia". This phrase describes translation into Georgian by Arsen of one of the most philosophic Greek fathers, Gregory of Nyssa, and its enigmatic ending that Arsen was the only one to make the candle of the Holy Sophia/Wisdom, perhaps means that he aspired to combining Christianity and philosophy. In fact, the entire spirit of the Gelati school was exactly in this combination, and that is why an anonymous historian of the King David views Gelati as a unity of Athens and Jerusalem. The Gelati school translators, unlike the preceding school of translators from Mt Athos aspire at closest exactitude of rendering of Greek philosophic texts. With this respect, especially interesting is translation of the work of VI century representative of Alexandrian philosophic school, Amonius Hermeas. In the first chapters of his book Amonius provides different definitions of the term "philosophy". Among those is this one: "to philosophize is to become like God, to the extent anybody can". However, no original philosophic work had been written before Ioane Petritsi. As evident from the above facts, it was not in a complete vacuum that Petritsi started his pioneering undertaking: to provide his Gelatian students a systematic, fundamental philosophic education.

The works that have come down to us that definitely belong to Petritsi are three: 1. Nemesius of Emesa's "On human nature", which Petritsi apparently translated and sporadically commented at an earlier stage of his literary exploits; 2. Preface of his commented translation of Psalms, which is a manifesto of harmony between Christian

religion and philosophy and 3. the most important work – commented translation of Proclus’ “Elements of Theology”. All those works speak for themselves and show Petritsi’s major goal: to introduce a systematic, disciplined course of philosophy. In case of translation of Nemesius, this is a comprehensive anthropologic, whereas in case of Proclus a similar metaphysical treatise. As to the preface of the Psalms, as evident from this text, Petritsi added this to his commented translation of this biblical book. Unfortunately, this main part of the text is lost. I think, it was purposefully destroyed by the censorship, which spared only the introduction, but deemed it dangerous to expose general audience to metaphysical interpretations of the major text of Christian divine service.

Petritsi’s vision, his major intuition is that the world, its entirety, has an objective, orderly structure, or as he calls it “the truth that co-exists with beings”, which is cognizable through our intellect by means of dialectic reasoning; that the world is not only what is given to us through senses, but beyond the perceptible universe is hidden its supra-perceptible foundation, which does not reveal itself to us directly but is discoverable by efforts of our intellect. That, through which we cognize universe, Petritsi calls our inner “dialogic/dialectic word”, or “inner Hermes”, i.e. the interpretative principle. This immanent word is activated by its rubbing with the Divine Logos; that is to say, dialectic thought is governed by the Divine Word, thus representing a synergic co-action of our inner logos with the Divine Logos. I have mentioned above, that in Petritsi’s vision the structure of the universe and its invisible foundations are cognizable, however it will be more exact to say that human being is also obliged to perform this intellectual act, because most principally exactly through this dialectical capacity a human being differs from beasts. However, the activation of the dialectical capacity requires an exact conceptual apparatus, an orderly terminological system, a technical language adequate to metaphysics. Petritsi regards creation of such a language as the precondition for conducting a voyage from the visible to the invisible. In fact, he says that before him having created such a technical language, no such voyage was possible in Georgia by philosophic-dialectic means.

Petritsian synthesis of Platonic philosophy and Christian theology is based upon his *a priori* faith, that both speak about one and the same truth. If ultimate human aim is to rise to contemplation of metaphysical, intelligible world (which Petritsi translates as „ადმკული“/“adornment” after the Greek κόσμος) where eternally and inextinguishably shine perfect Ideas and if, moreover, Bible represents a true revelation, then also this revelation is nothing else than a metaphorical story concerning human journey towards or connectedness with the same world of Ideas. Actually, for Petritsi, the Neoplatonic philosophy is a key for cracking the biblical metaphors and uncovering metaphysical theories in them. Thus, the biblical “Adam” for Petritsi represents a metaphor for a soul that dwells blissfully in the world of Ideas, whereas the trees of the paradise are those very Ideas beheld by the soul before her fall, that is to say, before her loosing the intellectual wings. In fact, the principal purpose of human life is to “re-grow” those intellectual wings and turn back to supra-material contemplation. The words uttered by God towards Adam “Where are you, Adam?”, Petritsi understands as an admonition through a rhetorical question: “Look, from

where (i.e. the intelligible world) to where (i.e. the material world) your foolishness has brought you!". Furthermore, Petritsi ventures outright connections and even identifications of realities of the Neoplatonic philosophy with those of the Christian theology. Thus, for him the transcendent and supra-intellectual One is God the Father, while the metaphysical principles immediately following the One – the first Limit and the first Infinity – “co-essentially” as Petritsi states, are the same as the Son and the Holy Spirit respectively. Those are not simply comparisons, but, as I have said above, outright identifications, for Petritsi does not live in two separate universes one belonging to the Platonic philosophy whereas the other to the Christian revelation, but rather he creates a common universe from both traditions. Therefore, it is not surprising that he ascribes to Plato, on the one hand, words of Proclus, and on the other hand words of St. Gregory of Nazianzus, because for him, in fact, both Proclus and St. Gregory are explicators of hidden and obscure places of Plato’s dialogues. For Petritsi, words of St. Paul express metaphysical theories. For example, Petritsi puts the Pauline phrase “Who called the non-being as being” (Cf. Romans, 4:17) into the context of Neoplatonic terminology and provides a theory, according to which God, i.e. the transcendent One, produces from Himself the formless matter that is “non-being” in the sense that it is unintelligible for our intellects (for, in principle, intellect is powerless to cognize that, which has no structure whatsoever), however for the transcendent One this non-being is not non-being but being. It is possible that Paul would have been taken aback at such an interpretation of his words, but that is exactly Petritsi’s method: to see metaphysical seeds in the Holy Scripture and adjust them to the true visions of Proclus and other Neoplatonists. Petritsi is to such an extent confident and so positive with respect of plausibility and rightfulness of his grand synthesis and harmony that tends to neglect and turn a blind eye to apparent discrepancies between the doctrines of Platonic philosophy and those of the Orthodox Church, of which a member he himself believes to be. For example, incompatibility of the doctrine of the necessary, involuntary emanation (Neoplatonism) and the doctrine of volitional creation out of nothing (Christianity), which was the basic “apple of discord” between the adepts of the Neoplatonic School and the Christians. Neoplatonists, Proclus, Simplicius etc. wrote treatises – 18 of them belong to Proclus – against Christians exactly on this issue. A Christian, John Philoponus, regarded it his duty to refute from the standpoint of the Christian tenet of creation the Aristotelian vision of the history-less world, which is coeval with and uncreated by the supreme immaterial principle – the Unmoved Mover. This problem does not exist for Petritsi, and he in fact presents the life of Proclus as if this Neoplatonic master was a person comparable to a Christian saint, who through both ascetic and educational-dialectical feats attained to divine visions. Thus, apparently, Petritsi identifies the creation with emanation. Indeed he uses the term “creation” - “ქმნა”, “მექმნე” – but it is anything but clear whether he implies in this “creation” the instantaneous act, or eternal creation of the universe by the agency of God, which is possible to be translated also in the language of emanation.

There is one more problem connected with the theory of emanation: the world not only emanates from the One, but also reverts to It/Him and the first is unthinkable without

the second. Thus, if this cycle is in a sense a necessary cycle, then how can one comply this theory with a Christian doctrine on eternal division and secession of demons from God? If those demons are outside of the procession-reversion cycle, then they are outside the universe itself, for in fact everything should be included in this cycle. However, if they also participate in this cycle, then we can think that their secession from God is not radical and eternal and they also can revert. This Origenistic idea of restoration of all to the initial status, the so called “apokatastasis”, is not clearly present in Petritsi’s text, but seems to logically follow from his metaphysics for everything in both visible and invisible world partakes of the cycle of emanation from and reversion to the One.

Another discrepancy between the Platonism and Christianity is the Christian doctrine of hypostatic unity of body and soul, which denies the Platonic doctrine of preexistence and natural immortality of soul. In this quarrel Petritsi, I think, sides with Platonists. For him soul preexists and historical birth of man is “fall of soul in [the world of] becoming”. In this, Petritsi follows an ancient Christian tradition that originates from the thought of Origen the Alexandrian. Nemesius of Emesa, 4th century bishop, whose major opus “De natura hominis” Petritsi translated, also follows the same tradition. In fact Petritsi translates without any commentary and explanation Nemesius’ biblical exegesis that God’s rest after six days metaphorically indicates that He has created universe in its completeness, including all souls, while the words of Johannine Gospel “My father works until now and I work” (John 5:17) he interprets in terms of providential care upon the things already created and not any sort of new creations. Thus, according to Nemesius those who say that souls are created together with bodies are in a grave error. This and suchlike ideas (for instance, another Christian bishop of 5th century, Synesius of Cyrene cherished similar ideas about soul) were officially rejected and condemned by the fifth Ecumenical Council, however, Petritsi still adheres to one of those ancient traditions in Christian thought that predated the abovementioned council.

One more problem encountered by a Christian in dealing with the Neoplatonic thought is to accommodate the latter’s rigid doctrine of hierarchical causation with Christian vision of non-hierarchical causation in Holy Trinity: of the Son and the Holy Spirit from the Father. At least once Petritsi presents relationship of the One-the Father with the Son-the Limit and the Infinity-the Holy Spirit in a vertical-hierarchical fashion, however in other cases, where he speaks about “consubstantiality”, or when he adduces musical analogy of the Trinity, he seems to exclude any notion of hierarchy.

In addition, Petritsi faced a major difficulty in translating and explicating Proclus’ henadic theory. In Proclus henads represent eternal gods whom, being a polytheist, Proclus worships. In a drastic contrast, Petritsi calls henads “gods” only in a relative sense, because for him they are “created unities” and metaphysical entities “deified through participation”, which is a novel and a totally un-Proclian doctrine, being obviously a Georgian philosopher’s modification conditioned by his Christianity.

Petritsi’s theory of eros or passion towards God, I think, also differs from the Neoplatonic tenet. To wit, in Neoplatonism eros towards the One consummates with a

mystical, inexpressible union, where the desire is quenched and satisfied. Contrary to this, in Petritsi, as it seems, eros never ends and a new desire follows a previous one and so on and on. This assimilates Petritsi's view to mysticism of such Christian thinkers as St Gregory of Nyssa, with his idea of eternal striving, or eternal stretching-forth-towards God (the so called "epektasis"), or St Symeon the New theologian, who in his religious poetry speaks about thirst that is never satiated, due to the fact that new thirst arises upon the previous one. This difficult issue requires, I think, a more focused comparative study.

Petritsi's commented translation of Proclus' "Elements of Theology" in many ways represents an interest to modern scholars. One of the significance of this work is to study influence and role of Platonism and in particular of Proclus upon Eastern-Christian and Byzantine thought. In Byzantium, due to a tight imperial censorship, we do not possess any work that would have struck such an audacious harmonization of Platonic philosophy and Christianity. Neither in works of Michael Psellus, nor in works of his disciple John Italus, who was anathematized by his contemporary Constantinopolitan church, can one find an attempt of a synthesis of such a scale as in Petritsi. Therefore, Petritsi can witness to that movement in Byzantine thought that is not available to scholars who use only Byzantine sources, that went underground in the Empire, while revealed in full breadth and complexity in the Kingdom of Georgia where the grip of censorship seems to have been looser.

Besides, Petritsi's translation of the "Elements of Theology" bears a unique significance for scholars of this one of the crucial texts of Neoplatonism. This importance was first acknowledged by the most renowned editor – and translator – of this text, E. R. Dodds, who even used up to ten passages of Petritsi's text in order to establish authentic readings of Proclus. Uniqueness of Petritsi's text is in that the Georgian translation was made in 12th century, or the first half of the 13th century the latest. Therefore, that Greek manuscript – or manuscripts – which was used by Petritsi predated at least by decades the earliest extant manuscript of Proclus (the oldest among them belong to the turn of 13th and 14th centuries. Since the extant codices belong to different families that sometimes give totally divergent readings, a question stands as to which among them is most reliable and closest to the original text of Proclus. In this situation, Petritsi's translation, which usually aims at mirror exactness, can be used as a key giving us an access to the Greek text he used, and thus to the earliest available reading. Thus, what E.R. Dodds does with William Moerbeke's Latin translation – reconstructing occasionally his now lost Greek manuscript from his Latin translations – can and should be done with Petritsi's Georgian translation. It stands without question that for future editions of Proclus' text Petritsi's translations can have immense significance. Especially intriguing in this respect is one additional, 129th chapter in Petritsi's translation, absent from all the extant manuscripts of the "Elements of Theology". This chapter speaks about divine and *daimonic* souls. E.R. Dodds contended this chapter to not to be authentic and this was one of the reasons that he downgraded the value of the virtual Greek text available through Petritsi's translation. However, other scholars (Alexidze; Günther) provide interesting arguments to prove the authenticity of this chapter. Despite of what was said above, a great caution is to be taken in using Petritsi's translation as a key or a

bridge to his lost Greek codex, for Petritsi at times allows himself a considerable freedom during his translation. At some instances, due to different, theological, philosophical or pedagogical reasons Petritsi purposefully alters the Greek, or misunderstands the meaning, thus introducing his own ideas already in the translation itself. Those alterations sometimes are quite valuable in philosophical terms, however they do not adequately and objectively render Proclus' meanings.

Petritsi's dream was to establish a lasting philosophic school in Georgia and nurture philosophers similar to himself, who would succeed him. Admittedly Petritsi at least achieved that in Gelati monastery, where he launched a systematic course in philosophy that included all components of classical education: starting from Grammar-Rhetoric-Logic and Arithmetic-Geometry-Astronomy-Music (respectively the *trivium* the *quadrivium* in Boetius' terms), it culminated with metaphysics, or philosophical theology. Due to historical calamities, most significantly to the devastating invasions first of Khorezmians and then of Mongols, the tradition set up by Petritsi quickly ceased. And yet, such an emblematic figure of the medieval Georgian culture as Shota Rustaveli is impossible to be thought about without a reference to Ioane Petritsi. In fact, the entire philosophical terminology of Rustaveli is based on Petritsi's philosophical vocabulary. Moreover, Rustaveli's theory of eros as the anagogic/elevating divine power follows Petritsi's doctrine almost in all respects. Yet this is a topic of a separate discussion.

Petritsi enjoyed a huge respect in the entire medieval Georgia. His works were carefully copied as a sample of lofty, if extravagant, philosophical thought. This, however, hardly means that he was properly understood, for availability of the text only is not sufficient for its understanding, unless there exists an intellectual milieu, where such a text is a subject of a lively discussion, dialectical consideration etc. Or at least, where is present a teacher initiated in philosophy and metaphysical theories like Petritsi. Therefore, it is not a surprise that the copyists had a feeling of caution and even alarm, as vividly evidenced in one of the glosses warning that reader should not step out from the borders set by the holy fathers of the Church, lest he embraces a dangerous heresy that will lead his soul to eternal damnation. Petritsi was greatly admired by Catholicos Anthony in the 18th century, however it is hardly likely that he understood him adequately, due to the fact that Anthony was not any closely familiar with the Neoplatonic tradition. However, Petritsi was important for the Catholicos also for the reason that he was a creator of a new, technical philosophical language. Thus, Petritsi's example would be crucial for Anthony who also engaged himself in reforming the Georgian language and creating a linguistic theory of "three styles".

Petritsi's scholars

The first scholarly article on Petritsi, that still has not lost its importance, belongs to Niko Marr (1909)[11]. After him, in 1914 S. Gorgadze edited Nemesius of Emesa's "On Human Nature", translated by Petritsi, and wrote his introduction to it[13]. Popularity of Petritsi in the Soviet Union was facilitated by a Russian translation of Petritsi's commentaries that was edited and enhanced by Guram Tevzadze and Nodar Natadze who edited anew this

translation in the famous series “Philosophical Heritage” (1984)[7]. To I. Pantskhava belongs also a Russian monograph on Petritsi (1982) [15]. Other monographs on Petritsi belong to Shalva Khidasheli (1956)[9], Tamar Kukava (1971)[10] and Guram Tevzadze (2008)[16], who also has written numerous important articles both in Georgian and in prestigious Western periodicals. Shalva Nutsubidze’s and Simon Khaukhchishvili’s Georgian edition of Ioane Petritsi was a milestone in Petritsian studies (in 1937 were edited Petritsi’s commentaries and in 1940 Petritsi’s translation)[6]. However, the editors did not have access to the oldest 13th century manuscript (H-1337). The editors have written also introductory articles. Mose Gogiberidze wrote an introduction for the first volume (1940). In-depth study of Petritsi’s language belongs to Damana Melikishvili (1975)[12], who also has written many interesting articles on Petritsi, both on his language and philosophy. She also translated Petritsi into modern Georgian (1999)[5]. Petritsi studies were promoted by Ana Kharanauli, Edisher Chelidze – who was the first to discover that the so-called “Epilogue” in fact is introduction to Petritsi’s commented translation of Psalms – Tinatin Tskitishvili, Ketevan Bezarashvili, Magda Mchedlidze etc. Lela Alexidze’s contribution is to be especially distinguished, for she played a major role in international popularization and promotion of Petritsi studies. Besides many articles both in Georgian and Western European periodicals she wrote a monograph on Classical philosophical sources of Petritsi (2008)[1] that has become a reference book for Petritsi’s scholars, and most importantly, together with Lutz Bergerman she translated and edited Petritsi’s commentaries in German (2008)[8]. This edition, first time made Petritsi’s text accessible for the European audience. Tengiz Iremadze in his monograph (2004)[4] compared Petritsi’s thought, namely, his theory on intellect with theories of German mystical thinkers Dietrich von Freiberg and Berthold von Moosburg, by which he firmly established Petritsi in Western scholarly discourse on Medieval philosophy. To Tengiz Iremadze also belongs an important article on Petritsi for Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (2006). My articles in English – one of them with Gerd van Riel – and especially a monograph on Petritsi edited in the USA (2007)[2], I think, also have contributed to the Western audience’s familiarization of Petritsi. Western scholars also started to make independent contributions to Petritsi studies. The first among them was a German W. Offermans, who compared Petritsi’s and Thomas Aquinas’ ideas on causation [14]. Another German scholar, Hans Guenther, has recently got interested in the significance of Petritsi’s translation for establishment of the most ancient version of Proclus’ text. This scholar has published a study (2007)[3] and has translated into Greek twenty chapters of the Georgian translation as an example of how can one get access to Proclus’ authentic text through the Georgian text. The author of this article, together with Prof. Istvan Perczel presently works on the English translation of the entire text of Petritsi, which hopefully will see its readers in two years.

Without Ioane Petritsi, it is already difficult to imagine international scholarly discourse on Medieval Christian philosophy, and moreover so, since such a bold harmonization of Christian and Platonic traditions attempted by Petritsi, has hardly any analogues in Byzantium and Western Europe.

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